Adventure

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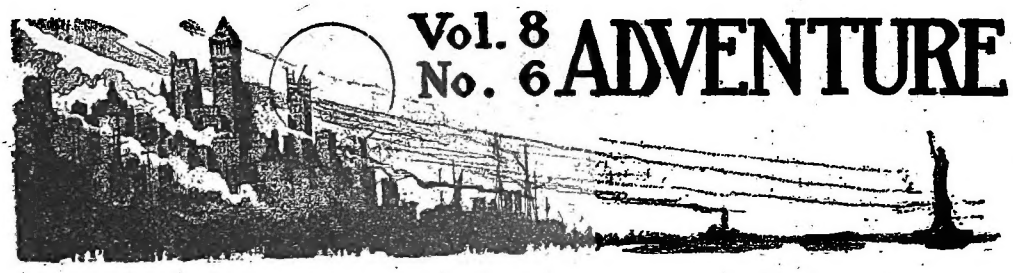

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CONTENTS for OCTOBER 1914

The Greenstone Mask *A Complete Novelette* . . . . . **Allan Dunn** . . 3

An adventurous scientist started the expedition to get the Greenstone Mask, and he took real men with him into the South Seas and New Zealand. They found other things they wanted and some they did not want. They got some of both. And there was plenty of excitement on the way.

Come-On Charley Deals in Art . . . . . **Thomas Addison** . . 45

The report that *Come-On* had inherited $2,000,000 has now taken a good hold and the "con" men flock to the attack. The genial *Charley* talks as little as ever and enters cheerfully into his next adventure. It turns out to have quite a little excitement in it.

The Chechakos . . . . . **E. Kirby Keener** . . 57

A tale of the North. The crack of a whip over a good team of dogs, and, enter a man and a woman —a man strong enough to match himself against all comers.

Not in the Movies: Being an Adventure of Miss Demonstrator . . **C. Hilton-Turvey** . 63

If it hadn't been for the movies they wouldn't have been in the tumble-down auto, if they hadn't been in the auto they wouldn't have passed through the woods just then, and if they hadn't done that——

The One-and-One And—— . . . . . **Octavus Roy Cohen** . 75

A man wins the heavyweight championship without ever being known to lose his temper. Then the story really begins.

Arsène Lupin—And the Tiger's Teeth *A Four-Part Story III* . . **Maurice Leblanc** . . 88

Mystery within mystery within mystery, action, action, action—that is the key-note of this story. The name of *Arsène Lupin* is sufficient guarantee for the rest.

An Open Secret *Poem* . . . . . **Charles Campbell Jones** 133

The Log of a Beach-Comber *An Article* . . . . . **Charles Neville Buck** . 134

Being a true chapter from a man's life—a man with restless feet.

Traditions of the Service . . . . . **Carl M. Chapin** . . 142

Being an insight into just what it means to show a "streak of yellow" in the fire department.

(Continued on next page)

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(*Continued from preceding page*)

The Getaway . . . . . **Rudolph R. Krebs** . 150

This is one of the stories you live instead of read.

A Maker of Wars . . . . . **Edgar Wallace** . . 160

Take an American with a sense of humor, not too much conscience and an empty stomach, set him down in Africa with a chance to "start something," and will anything happen?

Jack Hedley's Burros and Mr. Morrison *A Complete Novelette* . . **W. Townend** . . 166

Here is a tale of the desert lands of our Southwest. You will find that W. Townend has not spent all his time upon the sea.

Safe or Out? . . . . . **Hugh S. Fullerton** . 181

Baseball is said to be rather interesting. The author—you read his World's Series "dope" every year—has spent a considerable part of his life with the big-league players and has stories to tell.

The Guns of the Seventy-Third . . . . . **Donald Francis McGrew** 186

American soldiers in the Philippines. A fight. Some results. A bill of expenses. And other interesting matters.

"Go, Tell the Czar!" A Tale of Dick Anthony of Arran *A Complete Novelette* . **Talbot Mundy** . . 193

Now *Dick Anthony* comes to the scene of his *real* adventures! Big things begin to happen. Watch them. By and by they will shape themselves into the biggest thing of all. Can you guess what it is? *Dick Anthony* has just been getting started. Before he's through he's going to make you hold your breath hard.

The Camp-Fire **A Meeting-Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers.** 219

The Trail Ahead 224

Headings . . . . . ***Thornton D. Skidmore***

Special Attention

is called to three of the stories in the next issue, November, out October 3rd.

"TRIPLETS TRIUMPHANT"
By ROBERT V. CARR

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Dick Anthony of Arran has been having plenty of adventures, but in this complete novelette he has more than in all the others put together. Talbot Mundy at his best.

All the other stories in November deserve special attention. Many of you will like it better than any issue we ever published. See page 224 for other items.

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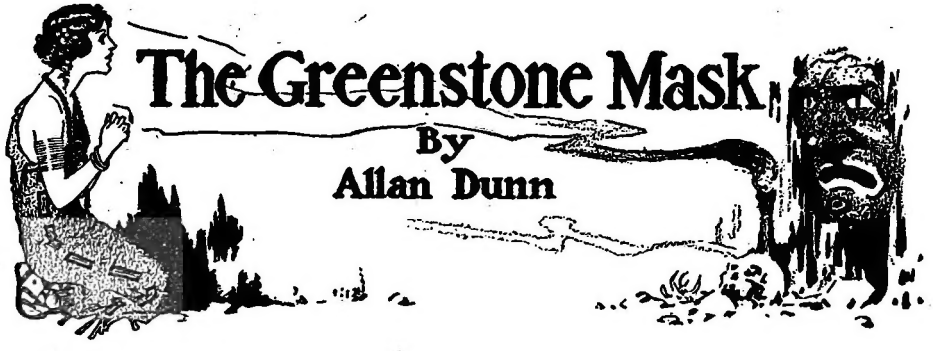

The Greenstone Mask

By Allan Dunn

CHAPTER I

BARON SCHUSSLER MAKES AN OFFER

HAWKES, South Sea trader, master-owner of the schooner *Ono*, sat before his appetizing breakfast untempted. Patea, the Raiatean steward, surveyed disconsolately the neglected meal which he had prepared so carefully.

Apricot-fleshed papaya, halved and giving off a spicy odor, fish-pond mullet broiled to the second, fragrant coffee, all going to comparative waste—for the fish and the coffee would be spoiled by the time they got back to the galley, for his own.

"Clear away, Patea," said Hawkes, reaching for his pipe. "Tell Dicky-Dick I'm not going ashore this morning. He's to get the mail."

Hawkes' lack of morning appetite was not occasioned by a *katzenjammer*. He was not a drinking man, as drinkers are gaged in Polynesia.

Yet his thoughts held regrets for the evening before. A run-in at poker with some fellow skippers and a hard-bitten storekeeper had confirmed the condition of his luck, persistently bad on all accounts for the past few months, and culminating in the holding of four eights—sitting next to the ace—which had fallen before a picked-up straight flush.

Practically nothing but his schooner, and credit—offset by trade-room bills—was left of personal assets that, a year before, had totaled up handsomely.

At thirty—six feet, a hundred and eighty-five pounds in a loin-cloth, sun-tanned till his skin showed like pale copper against the gold of his crisp hair and mustache—ten years of knocking about the world of the South Seas had neither undermined his constitution nor, if it had relaxed, had it destroyed his moral fiber.

He was not of the "perishing blond" type. The violet rays of tropical sunlight failed to break up his dermal tissues.

Pride in his person and a naturally clean mind had kept him from overindulgence in alcohol or from succumbing to the lethargy that saps the vigor of the majority of white men who elect to live in the zone that lies between the Tropics of Capricorn and Cancer. There, where they are apt to judge

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a man by the strength of his good right arm, Hawkes was rated high by men and women alike. He bore his honors, especially with the latter—who called him "Handsome Harry" to his face—lightly; and his *liaisons* had never assumed the shape of entanglements.

His own master of a roving trade scattered from the Solomons to the Marquesas, he was at a present loss where he should go next.

The rains had been overlong, and the copra was late and scanty. There was a pearl-patch he had been told of overnight that might be exploited, but it was far from Tahiti, where the *Ono* now lay, off in the Little Coral Sea, and the chances of finding it unexploited seemed, in the state of his luck, few.

"NO MAIL, *kapitani*," said Dicky-Dick, appearing in the cabin. "One man he come along in boat and want speak you. He give this."

Hawkes took the card from his boatswain and acting second mate.

"Baron Hermann Schussler," it read, with a string of letters beneath the name, some of which Hawkes recognized as symbols of membership in various geographical and scientific societies.

"All right, Dicky-Dick. Show him below and tell Patea to set out the Scotch and cigars."

The newcomer, clad in ducks and a solar helmet, was a bizarre figure. Nature had not been kind in the molding of Baron Schussler. She had achieved her best in modeling his head, and then had apparently been content to let it go at that.

His legs, encased in wrinkled ducks, were bowed.

His narrow shoulders sloped.

He was pigeon-breasted. (There was strength, though, in his skinny arms, covered with a grizzle of hair to the knuckles of his nervous hands.)

His head and face were enormous, hairless save for a straggling fringe of red streaked with gray about the base of his skull.

His eyes were pale green, without brows or lashes—the only spots of color in the even pink of his complexion.

"Head like a big pink pearl," thought Hawkes. "Exactly like a great pink baroque."

"Goot morning," said his visitor. "Captain Hawkes, I haf peen seeking you for months. *Ja*, five months!

"I gome after you from Guadalancar to Levuka, to Samoa, und yesterday I gome ofer from Raiatea on der *Berthe* to Tahiti. You are a jack-lantern."

"I'm a free trader, Baron Schussler," answered Hawkes, "and I'm jumping sideways most of the time."

"So! But I haf found you at last," returned the Baron. "I am a scientist, Captain, what some call a crank.

"It iss for me to link up de great Polynesian migration. For twenty years I haf worked—Malaysia, Melanesia, und Polynesia, und at last—" his green eyes snapped—"I see de end in sight!

"I will brove to them my theory. Ach! But I will brove it!"

"You, they told me," he went on, "are young—I can see that—und adventurous. Well, I haf for you a liddle adventure. *Ja*, und some brofit. That is goot?

"I seek for a mask of greenstone. It is worth to a museum many thousands of dollars. For that I care not. That iss to be de brofit in de adventure.

"But I shall brove to those fools who seek by language to trace de origin of de human species, that ethnology, und not philology, is de one great science of race-determination; und it shall pring to me great satisfagtion und berhaps a liddle of fame. So!

"I, I am a scientist, busy always with work, with gomparisons, und puddings-together. I need a man who knows de island beobles, und who shall pe a manager, a leader of the exbedition. You can do that? *Nein?*"

"Where do we go, Baron?" asked Captain Hawkes.

"Nod Baron, my friend. Schussler und Hawkes it shall pe. It is a bartnership I offer. We go first to de Solomons und to Abua, de leber settlement, und then to New Zealand above Auckland.

"There it shall pe a land-journey, with your schooner to wait."

"I have never been to New Zealand save to run in to Auckland and Wellington," said Hawkes doubtfully.

"It iss of no gonsequence. I haf not peen there myself. But I haf learned de language. Und you too can speak it. It iss easy. It iss but de same as Hawaiian,

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Tahitian; it iss of a root with all Polynesian tongues. Only are the gonsonants changed sometimes."

"For how long?" queried Captain Hawkes cautiously.

"Und how much? I will charter your schooner for six months.

"We shall settle on de terms. I will bay all eggsbense. I shall gif you for your time —how much? Five hundred bounds? We shall not quarrel as to that.

"Und if we find de mask, we shall sell it—when it has broved my theory—to Berlin, to Vienna, to de British Museum —to de highest pidder, to bay eggsbenses.

"It will pring ten, twelve, maype fifteen, twenty thousand pounds. Of that I offer half."

He leaned back on the transom.

"It sounds good," said Hawkes. "Will you have some Scotch?"

"I thank you, no, my friend. I shall haf candy—de calorics."

He took a package of butter-scotch from his coat, stripped off the foil and put the sweet morsel in his mouth.

"It iss petter, candy. Look you, I hear you drink not often. It is goot.

"When I was a student, I drank much. It was in de plood—always, for many generations—but when I began to learn for my own sake, I found it glouded de prain.

"Yet was de yearning. De ghemistry of my pody needs calorics, so I gif it what it wants—in sugar. You will try?"

"No, thanks," dodged Hawkes. "I'm smoking."

"About gredentials. We shall go to Apia, und there you shall ask de gonsul und my bankers. Here it iss France—" he made a gesture of dislike—"und they know me not. I will advance money that shall pe needed, und at Apia we shall outfit."

"I don't need any immediate cash, thanks," said Hawkes. "Let me think it over for a while and I'll let you know this evening. Will that suit?"

"Surely. It iss to pe an adventure, my friend, und de brofit. One should nefer, efen when one is young, as you are young, forget de brofit. You will find me at the Hotel l'Égalité."

He pronounced the French name as if it were bitter in his mouth, and bowed.

"Dicky-Dick," said Hawkes, after he had seen his visitor over the rail, "look up your boys and Mr. Manners. We sail tomorrow. I'll be ashore later for stores. Send Patea aft."

CHAPTER II

THE MASK OF ITUPAOA

THE *Ono* lay at anchor off the village of Kerikeri in the Bay of Islands, high on the northeastern coast of New Zealand. The schooner had traveled far since the quest for the mask had commenced at Tahiti. To Apia first, and then south to the Tongas, to the Fijis and the New Hebrides, and on to the Solomons; calling there at Guadalancar, Florida Island, Choiseul, and New Mecklenburg; everywhere welding the links of Baron Schussler's theory.

Many a palaver had Hawkes and the scientist held with sorcerer and wizard—*Kahuna* and *Tindalo*—the medicine-men of the South Seas.

In the New Hebrides they had touched at Abua, or Lepers' Island, to visit an ancient horror with a skin piebald from disease, who looked like a Samoan but claimed to have come from New Zealand nearly a hundred years back; and who, with his skin wrinkled till it looked like the hide of an alligator, seemed easily over a century old.

Following up his memories, they had dropped below the twentieth degree of latitude and called at the Island of Miru, off the Loyalty Group—a lonely place deserted after the third hurricane in ten years had laid it waste; and there, on a seaward cliff, in a rotting grass-thatched temple, surrounded by monstrosities of wooden fetishes leering drunkenly on their crumbling pedestals, Hawkes and Schussler had found, twisted and checked by the weather, a great wooden mask.

One eye of pearl-shell had fallen from the shallow socket, and vestiges of green paint clung to the tortuous lines of the sneering mouth. The thing was some two feet in height, and held a certain hypnotic faculty in the sheer malignity its creator had carven into the exaggerated features. This was the mask that the scientist had sought for among the South Sea groups before proceeding for New Zealand.

"It iss a duplicate of der real mask of greenstone," he told Hawkes. "The Face of Itupaoa!

"The original, according to de legends,

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was brought from Hawaiki—which iss brobably Hawaii—in de big Maori migration. It was a great fetish, und brotected the tribe that owned it.

"In New Zealand, later, twins were born, Ngoko und Nga-Toro. There was trouble apout brecedence, und Ngoko drove his brother from de tribe.

"But Nga-Toro stole de mask, und Ngoko, afraid for de loss to become known, had a reblica made of wood und painted to look like *pounamu*, which iss greenstone or de New Zealand jade.

"So! Then there was a pattle, und de men with de true mask won, und drove de rest to de sea und into their canoes. The trades must haf plown them northwest until they landed at that now deserted Island of Miru. I haf long heard of de reblica und sought for it, but that leper at Abua subblied de last link when he disglosed de secret of its hiding-place.

"Here iss a photograph of a drawing of de original mask. It was made, with many notes, by a scientist named Barr, who died in de interior of New Zealand but sent in his notes und de drawing to de British Museum—where I found them—by de hand of Mr. Black there."

Black, a lantern-jawed, hawk-eyed New Zealand trader who had joined the *Ono's* forces in Auckland, nodded.

"He will tell to us his story bresently," went on Schussler as Hawkes compared the photograph with the wooden mask from Miru which was upon the cabin-table. The drawing tallied exactly with the distorted face, carved in lines and spirals in the style of the Maori *moko* (tattoo).

"This relic must be pretty badly discredited now," said Hawkes. "That's why they left it hanging in the old temple. Bad luck to destroy it altogether, I suppose. It ought to furnish us with a good introduction, though. What about this Barr chap, Black, and how far is it to where this tribe that holds the real article hangs out?"

BLACK poured out whisky for himself. Hawkes lit his pipe, and Schussler peeled off a fresh square of butter-scotch.

"It's about ninety miles up-country," said the trader, "at a *pa* (village enclosure) on the shore of Roto Mahana—the Warm Lake. Old Mauohi is the chiefess and high priestess of the Nga-Puhis, the largest tribe in New Zealand.

"I'm not over-keen about going at all, as I told Baron Schussler in the first place. You are going into the closest spot to hell that I know of on earth, and though I won't probably be allowed to go all the way with you, I don't like the neighborhood. I doubt whether you are counting all the risks—I don't know them all myself—but they're plenty; and if you dodge poor Barr's fate, whatever that was, you're in luck. Still, that's one reason why I'm with you—aside from the money consideration, which is liberal. If I can even up matters any by helping to find the mask, I'll be repaid."

"Were you with Barr to the last?" asked Hawkes.

"The last any white man ever saw of him," corrected Black. "He went back into the crater against all advice and warning in the face of Mauohi's threats, and that was the end of him. You may see something of him though," he added grimly.

"I thought you said he was dead?"

"Oh, he's dead. What I meant was that his smoked head is probably stowed away somewhere in Mauohi's treasure-house and his teeth made into a necklace for some sorcerer. I don't want to be an alarmist, but you've seen things in the South Seas, and the natives there don't discount the Maoris for cruelty. Of course, outwardly, they are all civilized now, but it isn't so long ago when they were practising all their pleasant little ways.

"Mauohi must be over a century old, and she hasn't improved with age. She was the estimable lady who played the kindly hostess to her captive chief—he had killed and eaten her brother, by the way—and after she had fed him on the fat of the land for three weeks, she had him bound to a tree, stuck an iron rod into his jugular and drank the blood as it spouted. That's history, gentlemen, not romance.

"The old days and ways when they plucked out the left eye of the man they killed and promptly swallowed it to possess his spirit before it got away from the body, are her ways. Many a heart she has seen cooked in the sacred ovens and served to the sorcerers. They are a cheerful crowd. She does nothing openly now, of course; but a hundred miles of New Zealand bush is a broad barrier, and what happens sometimes

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back there in the interior is best guessed at and left alone."

"But you're going back with us?" queried Hawkes.

"Oh, I am a sort of protégé of old Mauohi's. She saved my father's life once when he was captured by old King To-Heu-Heu in the days when the Maoris were putting up their last fight against the whites. Dad was just a youngster then, and Mauohi took a fancy to the kid and threw her blanket over him, which made him *tabu*. Then To-Heu-Heu decided to use him as ambassador—it was about the time he made a treaty with the whites—and he gave him a carved meerschaum pipe that I still have, and some other gifts, and sent him down safe to the coast.

"Dad was always grateful to Mauohi—sent her presents and did her good turns from time to time. I've done the same, off and on, and she's as friendly to me as she can be to any white man. She doesn't hold me accountable for Barr's actions. She warned him against the wrath of Itupaoa if he meddled with the mask, and proclaimed him punished by the god for trying to steal his image. I don't know how he died, but I'll bet she had a hand in it, though she was in the *pa* all the time.

"I believe one reason why she would not let me go with Barr when he went into the crater was that she suspected he'd make an attempt to get away with the mask, and didn't want me to get mixed up in the trouble. The old witch is fond of me after her fashion.

"There was no doubt of Barr's death, though. We waited three weeks for him to come back, until we heard them celebrating his death in the *pa*. Mauohi gave me his notes and the drawing, to show the white man, she said, how foolish it was to try and cheat her gods. I sent them to England to an emergency address he had given me, and from there I imagine they were transferred to the British Museum.

"But if you two are figuring on getting clear with that mask, short of using a gatling gun or an airship or both, you are going to have troubles. Government punishment to follow never goes for much in the bush until it's all over. But that's your business, and I'm with you as far as we get—and back, I hope."

"You're a cheerful prophet," said Hawkes. "Have another drink."

"Oh, I guess we'll make it all right. Barr wasn't much of a diplomat; but look out for tricks."

"Just where is the mask?" asked Hawkes.

"I don't know for certain. There is a great crater back of the Warm Lake—an enormous place, miles across. Rough lava sides all about it, and the only way in is through one of those lava subways that you can find all over the country, where the hot core of the lava rolled on and left a tube of the cooling skin. Miles long, some of them. There are some famous ones close to Auckland—the Three Kings, they call 'em. Natives use 'em for burial-places."

"I know what you mean," said Hawkes. "I've seen them in Hawaii."

"Well, this one goes clear through the outer wall of the crater. Beyond that you cross the floor to the other side, where there are geysers and mud fountains. The mask is hidden somewhere in a cave. No one knows where now except Mauohi. The lava tunnel is full of branches she alone knows the secret of. They kept me at the entrance when Barr went in. I believe there's another way out of the crater, down a lava-flow, but you can't climb in that way. Too many cliffs."

"With their superstitions," said Hawkes, "we ought to be able to fix up something by springing this copy of the mask on them. I've had slides made of it for a projection lantern. Baron Schussler and myself have already worked some pretty little *séances* together in the islands with sodium and big electric torches, and I have some special ideas for this trip."

"The wizard lay is always a good one, of course," said Black. "But it's risky. Other men besides Captain Cook have slipped up playing the god business. But you know that as well as I do. The electric torch sounds well. It's new with them, though it's funny what impresses them and what don't. Take the phonograph, now—first time they hear it they're scared stiff, and then they make up their mind there's a god in the box, and that explains the mystery. Same way with moving-pictures.

"It's the simple things their minds can grasp the use of that make the hit. I got rich once with a dozen screws. When they saw them holding two chunks of wood together they were crazy for them. If I'd had a gross right then I could have cornered the New Zealand curio-market.

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"Electricity is good now, like matches used to be. But it's hard to work the old tricks. Fireworks and seidlitz powders, and that sort of truck, is worked out. It's best to follow one line. Be a specialist wizard, so to speak. That electric torch ought to be a hummer of an idea. Useful, too, going through the tunnel."

"Well," said Hawkes, "let's run over the program."

Schussler looked up from his comparison of the masks, from which he had excluded all conversation. He invariably left all details to Hawkes as Captain, stage manager, and active leader of the expedition.

"*Ja*," he said. "One moment." And wrapping up the time-worn mask carefully in cloth he took it to his cabin.

"You," said Hawkes to the trader, "are you going to supply two natives from the village here?"

"Yes. Two good bush-boys who know the trails and will help pack."

"Good. I'm taking Dicky-Dick, my bo'sun, and four more Raiateans. I'll leave the schooner in charge of my mate, Manners. He's to cruise up and down the coast a matter of twenty miles after he careens here and cleans bottom. We're pretty foul. If he doesn't hear from us within a month, he's to go to Auckland and take up the matter of a relief-party with the authorities. That strike you as all right, Schussler?"

"*Ja.* I leaf it to you, Captain. You arrange it with Black. Now I shall go to ped. We start early?"

"Going to send the men ashore at daylight. Then we can pick up Black's two boys and get going while the day's young."

"That suits me," acquiesced the trader.

"I'll join you in a nightcap," said Hawkes, "and we'll all turn in."

CHAPTER III

MAUOHI'S WELCOME

THE party traveled in light marching order, sharing the burden of provisions and equipment. A collapsible boat, a fly-tent, blankets, cooking-utensils, canned meat and soups, desiccated vegetables, tea, tobacco, and crackers, made up the bulk of the packs. The three white men carried automatic pistols, and Black a shotgun for the pigeons, guinea fowl and iguanas they would shoot by the way. Hatchets, knives, silk scarfs and squares, gaudy calicoes, and strings of glass beads, made up offerings for the chiefs, with a special gift for Mauohi. Hawkes' box of tricks included four powerful electric torches with bull's-eye lenses and extra batteries capable of burning for forty-eight hours, Coston night-signals of all colors, a galvanic battery, and a projecto-scope with slides of the Miru mask. A phonograph, with some special records, completed the "magic" paraphernalia.

They left the Kerikeri River, roaring in its deep ravine, and headed northwest through lofty forests of *kauri* pines, their plumed tops tossing in the air two hundred feet above the ground. Forty feet in diameter, the great shafts lifting a hundred feet without a branch, they were rivaled, as the travelers left the seacoast, by the giant cedars and *totara* pines. Enormous fuchsias and flowering shrubs, with golden showering laburnums, formed great glossy-green barriers with the lower shrubs starred with bloom, generally scarlet. These in turn gave way, as they gained elevation, to interminable plains of fern, dreary in their monotony of tone, relieved occasionally by the umbrellas of the tree-ferns, *dracænas*, and the one palm of New Zealand.

Flowers under foot were rare, but in the groves gorgeous orchids and air-plants, many of the latter fragrant, made up for the lack of ground-blossoms. There were few butterflies and none large nor particularly brilliant, but bees boomed among the flowers, parrots screamed overhead, red-breasted pigeons cooed softly, blue-breasted guinea-fowl flashed across the aisles, and the Maori nightingale—the *korinako*—sang at will through the round of day and night.

It was a cheerful caravan. The Raiateans chummed readily with the two natives, and found no difficulties in the way of mutual understanding. Hawkes soon picked up the idiom and, once the change of consonants was fixed in his mind, found he had a good working vocabulary. The weather was fine, and they made good progress, despite the heavy bush.

A great native road traversed the island not far from their route, but this they avoided to offset delay at the villages along its course. They started early and marched late, and despite the loads the fifth day found them approaching a thickly wooded hill beyond which, Black told them, lay Roto Mohana. On its shores was the *pa*

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where Mauohi had her headquarters. Above the highest ridge a serrated mountain showed like a blue stain above the cloudless sky. This was the crater of Pouritangawatiriri—the Abode of Darkness and Thunder—hiding somewhere in its fire-swept chambers the greenstone mask.

THE final rise was deceptive, being broken up into great gulches where the earth had cracked from north to south. Hitherto the ravines had run in the opposite direction, and the expedition had avoided trouble. Now came the hard work of clambering steep, forested slopes, the way choked with dense undergrowth through which they toiled and sweated with their packs; scrambling down abrupt cliffs which, on the western side of the gorges, were made up of shifting pipe-clay. In the bottoms ran streams, small but in full spate, to cross which makeshift bridges had to be thrown by felling convenient trees.

Up seven of these heights they toiled, and slid down seven gulfs, each seeming steeper than the last. Toward the summit the trees and brush grew scarcer, and the last pitch was covered waist-high with fern, giving out a faint fragrance as they waded through the fronds, while the wrinkled bulk of the crater towered ever higher above them as they climbed.

At the summit the natives, streaming with perspiration, flung themselves under fern-clumps, seeking refuge from the blaze of noon; but the three white men, wiping the salty moisture from their eyes, stood gazing at the view.

Below, at the foot of high palisades of pipe-clay, lay Roto Mohana, fringed with swamps, its waters gleaming with a pale, metallic luster. The lake formed an almost perfect oval of about two by three miles. In the center rose a verdant island, crowned with rocks from which arose jets of vapor. Beyond, squatting in the morass, the stockaded *pa* could be made out, with fern-clad cliffs behind it, lifting to rolling dark-green slopes, surging in great waves about the bastioned flanks of Pouritangawatiriri.

The landscape lay quivering in the heat, the fissures of the crater-walls plainly marked by deep purple shadows. The eye, traveling from the bulk of the dead volcano to the lake, found the latter dwarfed by comparison to a puddle, the cliff beneath them but an insignificant slope; while the mind, in active connotation, set the adventurers down as pigmies traveling in a land of giants and unknown, forbidding forces.

BLACK broke the spell by bidding the Maoris seek out a gully for an easy descent of the cliffs. Hawkes, who had been searching the shores of the lake with his glasses, closed them with a snap.

"Here's where our collapsible boat comes in," he said. "There are no canoes this side of the lake and they can't see us from the *pa*. Do you think you had better go ahead, Black?"

"I'll take my two boys and bring back canoes for you all," answered the trader. "It's just as well to give them warning. I'll play herald. They always like a chance to arrange a ceremonial greeting."

The lake-shore reached, the canvas boat was unpacked and stretched. Its proportions, like those of an ancient coracle, were far from elegant, and the two Maoris looked askance at the jointed sculls. Black put into the boat the gifts selected for a preliminary present and got gingerly aboard. The natives balanced themselves on the thwarts, and, soon getting the trick of the clumsy craft, used the blade-halves of the sculls as paddles, and started at a good pace toward the island and the other shore.

IT WAS an hour before two high-prowed canoes appeared from behind the island and came swiftly toward the waiting group. In the meantime they had eaten a hasty meal and collected the stores for embarkation. A breeze had sprung up, wrinkling the lake and waving the plumes of vapor that arose steadily from the hot springs on the island.

The canoes touched softly on the reedy margin, ten men at the paddles in each craft—stalwart Maoris in loin-cloths, who called out in smiling welcome, "*Aroha, arikis!*" ("Welcome, chiefs!") as they leaped into the shallow water and ran the long canoes between the yielding rushes. Black sprang ashore and joined Hawkes and Schussler.

"It's all right," he said. "We go in this canoe, and Dicky-Dick with his boys and the packs in the other. I left my boys at the *pa*. The chiefs will meet us there. I haven't seen Mauohi, but she sends welcome."

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The paddlers, save for steersmen, discarded their blades for the back trip and, shipping the masts, unfurled fanlike sails, the canoes making swift progress before the breeze.

"There are only a few things to remember," said Black. "I've arranged for the tent to be set up outside the *pa*—told them you wanted to be undisturbed. That dignifies you and lets us out of accepting a stuffy hut, half cellar and half smoke-house. Let them do the entertaining. They've got the ovens started for a big feast tonight. All we have to do is to sit tight and be tickled over the grub. It'll be good, but the more you smack your lips and say '*pai-pai*,' the better hit you'll make.

"We won't see anything of Mauohi until tonight in the big council-house, after the speechmaking is over. Her granddaughter, Koroa, is sick—*tabued* in a little hut in a grove outside the *pa*. The wizards held council today and gave her up. Probably malaria, maybe consumption; lots of 'em have it."

As they passed the island with its smoking crest of lava and pumice, the steersmen swerved from their course to avoid the scalding spray sprinkled from the spurting steam-jets by the wind. Ahead lay the *pa*, its stockade sloping to the water's edge. Landing, they walked toward the palisade of sturdy, upright poles, fifteen feet in height, braced strongly by horizontal timbers. Most of the uprights were rudely blocked out into a semblance of the human figure.

The main gateway opened before they reached it and a score of magnificently proportioned natives, their tall figures mantled in fine mat blankets bordered in colored designs, came to meet them with outstretched right hands. The leader was a bronze Hercules well over six feet in height, bearded crisp and short, his strong face covered with the indigo spirals of the *moko*. As the little procession advanced, the sound of a melodious chant came from the *pa* in pleasing harmony of thirds and fifths.

"The song of welcome," said Black. "It will change to what they call the *tangi* when we get inside. Don't worry when you see the women crying their hearts out. They like it, and it's a compliment."

The stalwart chief came forward.

"Welcome," he said, and gave his name —Putiri.

Greetings exchanged, the attendant chiefs parted and Putiri led the way through the gate and down a palisaded lane to a central courtyard, freshly strewn with ferns. There the women burst into sobs as the strangers mounted the wide veranda of the council-house.

It was an odd welcome, and Hawkes looked quizzically at Black.

"I told you," said the trader. "They turn on the tap at any excitement. Deaths, births, funerals or weddings, how-d'ye-do and good-by. All the same to them. Just love to weep. It'll soon be over."

THEY wandered through the *pa*, chatting with the courteous chiefs. The place was a fortress capable of offering stubborn resistance to anything short of cannonading or fire. A maze of high-fenced lanes led to private courtyards and houses of *totara* pine, thatched with sedge, the walls set with painted lattices of white and red and black, and the gable-ends and panels above the doors carved more or less elaborately, according to the degree of the owner, with images which constituted the family portrait-gallery. The *pa* was practically deserted, most of the natives having gone to the ovens to watch the preparations for the big feast.

The chefs were gathered about circular pits two feet in diameter and about one in depth. Stones had been placed in these, and resinous boughs piled up high above them and lighted. After these had burned down, the hot stones, the size of a fist, were set aside and the pits scraped clean of ashes.

"Same style as the South Sea ovens," said Hawkes. "Hope the grub's as good."

"It'll be good, all right," said Black. "I didn't get any lunch, and I'll make a hit with my appetite."

The three watched the chefs lining the bottom and sides of the pits with the hot stones, covering them with a thick layer of green leaves and sprinkling these with water. On this they placed potatoes and yams, sow-thistle and wild cabbage, eels and other fish, pigeons and joints of young pigs—all carefully wrapped in *dracæna* leaves. Another layer of leaves, more water and a blanket of soaked mats carefully tucked in to keep out the dirt as it was packed and piled over the mats, completed the preparations. The food was left to steam.

The feast was served with due ceremony. To each was given a plaited basket of green

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leaves containing a liberal portion of everything that had been in the ovens, and a piece of wonderful sweet yellow bread made from the pollen of the bulrush. After the eating came the *haka*-dance by the light of the fires and the rising moon, the lithe, posturing limbs of the dancers tinged with warm ruddy gleams and tipped with the colder moonlight as if between two calciums.

As the dance went on license was lost and decorum thrown aside, while the figures leaped and shouted about the fires, whirling, swaying, in couples or frenzied *pas seuls*. Suddenly a wizard, clad in a mat blanket dyed deep crimson and scrolled in black, stepped forward and tossed water on the hissing coals. Instantly the wild ballet ceased; the dancers vanished in the shadows, leaving the great courtyard to their chiefs and the white visitors, grouped on the council-house veranda.

"Now come the orators," whispered Black to Hawkes. "You'll hear something out of the ordinary. There'll be two of them, one to sound our virtues and the other to hold up Mauohi's end. Ours comes first. There he is now."

In a courtyard to the right a rich voice belled in the silence. The tone was deep but clear, with a good range and the easy inflections of the trained orator. At times he chanted as he improvised, cantillating his phrases and ending in a climax of rich baritone notes ringing out on the night.

"Did you follow him?" asked Black.

"Pretty well," answered Hawkes. "We'll have some trouble living up to our reputations. Ah! There's the other."

Mauohi's champion proved to be a silver-tongued tenor. He had a knack of trilling on his syllables and prolonging the vowels that was peculiarly effective. He was the star orator of the North Island, knew the fact, gloried in it, and was not above advertising it. He had been fed on the nightingale in his infancy, he announced, and had acquired all its sweetness. Tired of his own praises at last, he intoned a lengthy account of the ancestry of Mauohi, her age, her wisdom; and predicted for her eternal life and triumph over all her enemies. She ruled the ghosts of hell, and was the chosen friend of Purukau, the god of witchcraft. Fools were those who crossed her, and wise those who came and left in peace.

"De lady has peen brompting, I think," whispered Schussler as the orator wound up his peroration on top notes clear as those of a bugle.

"Sure thing," replied Black. "She plays fair, in a way. Gives warning to avoid trouble."

"Come," said Putiri, the chief who had first met them. "Mauohi awaits us."

"This is your scene," said Hawkes to the scientist. "I'll handle the mask."

They crossed the wide veranda and crawled through the low doorway into the great chamber of the *whare-runanga* (council-house). A fire burned in a stone pit, with snapping of resinous logs and a pungent suggestion of incense, at the foot of the main pillar that upheld the ridge-pole. The glow lit up the distorted features of the figure carved upon the post in high relief and sent a long, wavering finger of shadow toward a low platform at the farther end of the room. There a dozen wizards, trigged out in chaplets and fillets of fur and feathers, necklaces of teeth, and girdles and aprons of scarlet and yellow plumage, surrounded what at the first glance seemed an inanimate bundle of mats.

The unsteady light from stone lamps gave vague outlines to the group, and as the flares faltered and leaped up again the sneering grin of a carved head, the gleam of its shell eyes, would suddenly spring from the gloom and shrink back again.

SCHUSSLER advanced toward the low platform and placed his gift before the bundle of mats. It stirred, and a head was thrust forth swiftly from the shadows like the play of a lizard from a cleft. The features were indistinguishable. There was a mop of gray hair above two eyes that reflected the light as flakes of mica refract the glow of a campfire. A voice croaked the conventional welcome. Schussler responded for the party in due form, and the audience was started.

A tall and gaunt wizard, elaborately tattooed on face and thighs, with a smear of red ocher from top-lock to eyebrows that made his scalp look as if it had been split open, stepped forward to open the gift.

It had been carefully and cunningly chosen by Hawkes and Schussler. A square of brocaded yellow silk was wrapped about a box of red lacquer. Inside was a high comb of Spanish shape, carved from the shell of the hawkbill turtle by the lepers of Abua. Then came a silver-backed mirror,

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a powder-box of the same material—minus both puff and powder—and a necklace of deep red coral, with another of amber beads.

"That should fetch her," whispered Hawkes to Black as they stood in the shadow to let the scientist do the talking. "The box for her witch-charms, the mirror for her own—God save them!—the comb and the necklaces to tickle the eternal feminine. . . . It's made a hit. Look at her eyes!"

The old, old face was stretched out farther on its withered neck, like a turtle. The metallic orbs gleamed with a light that was not all reflected, and two claws came from behind the mats and caressingly appraised the gifts.

"It is good," croaked the hag, "and I shall not forget return. What is your mission, O strangers? *Paraki* (Black) tells us that you are seeking something."

"I come as a friend," said Schussler, speaking in Maori. "From far across the tidewaters, from beyond Hawaiki, from all the tribes that have flourished beneath the smile of Maui, we come and bring greeting. On the track of Nga-Toro-i-rangi and of Nga-Hue we have come, bringing news of the scattered tribes. We have talked with your kinsmen on a thousand isles. We bring news. We are the bearers of light!

"Listen, while I tell you the tale of the twin brothers Ngoko and Nga-Toro—" there was a stir at the mention of the names— "of the long voyage Nga-Toro made to the Isle of Miru after he had been driven from Te-Ika-a-Maui* by Ngoko; of the mask that hung in the temple on Miru—the wooden mask, the false face of Itupaoa."

SURPRISE and perturbation were visible among the chiefs. The wizards remained apparently unmoved. Only, their bodies seemed tense in the darkness, their gaze more concentrated. Then the rasping voice of Mauohi answered.

"Others have spoken to us of the Face of Itupaoa, O mighty sailor. Yet it would seem thou hast more to tell than they. Let thy light shine, O flame-bearer."

The sarcastic inflection of the voice of their chiefess appeared to meet the silent approval of the wizards. There was a rustling of necklaces and girdles. The chiefs gathered closer as the scientist continued. He wound up with a vivid description of the landing of Nga-Toro on the island of Miru after his losing battle and flight from his brother, the holder of the real mask; and told of the finding of the false face in the ruined temple of the seaward cliff. As he ceased, Hawkes took the cue and held up the wooden mask. It was hardly visible in the obscurity; and there was a craning of necks, though no one moved foot or hand.

Schussler stepped to one side and, pointing his electric torch like a wand, cried—

"Behold the Face of Itupaoa!"

A brilliant circle broke upon the wooden fetish with the vestiges of green paint still clinging to the spiral carvings of its features, and the one eye leering above the cruel mouth. A gasp went up from the wizards. Mauohi drew in her breath hissingly, and the crowding chiefs looked on with cries of astonishment and terror, falling on their knees before the mask.

Schussler suddenly switched off the torch and Hawkes lowered the mask. There was silence for a moment, heavy with mystery. Then Mauohi spoke again.

"Truly ye are Masters of Magic, O light-bearers. Much have you told us that we know is truth, and much that we knew not but must believe. We give you thanks. Was this thy mission? To tell us of Ngoko and Nga-Toro, and show us this false Face of Itupaoa?"

"All men are brothers," answered the scientist. "The mighty race from which Maui sprang has lived in many lands where now other races dwell. Our people would learn the truth of their wanderings. So have I sought to find the real mask, that the truth may be established and the story of all the tribes of the earth be in time linked together that all men may know each other as of the same family."

"Then it is to gaze upon the Face that you have come, O white brother of ours? Listen then in turn, and I, too, will tell a tale.

"Listen, O white men!" Her voice shrilled as she went on. "Another white man came seeking for the Face. Parri was his name. He knew not the story of Ngoko and Nga-Toro as you do; he bore no stick of the fire that leaps without scratching; but when I had shown him the Face he tried to steal it from me—from me, Mauohi, the guardian of the Face! In secret he went with Turi-Rau, my younger brother, who

* Literally, The Fish of Maui—the Maori name for New Zealand.

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knew the path. They sought to ravish the altar of the God. Make thy light shine, O stranger, and see the end of those who mock at Mauohi!"

With a sudden movement she thrust aside her outer mat, bringing with the same gesture from its folds a rough sack, from which two round objects bumped and rolled to the feet of the white men.

Again the circle of light flashed out, making a vivid focus upon the floor. Within its ring lay two heads, one that of Turi-Rau, tattooed and brown; the other yellow and shriveled, the tarnished gold fillings of the teeth gleaming dully between the leathery lips, the light hair and drooping mustache dry and faded—the head of a white man; the head of Barr!

AGAIN silence fell upon the great chamber. Even the breathing of the men was inaudible. Schussler stood motionless, holding the torch. Hawkes, raging, but realizing the folly of betrayal of emotion, felt Black's hand seek his and grip it.

Again Mauohi broke the silence, first with horrible cackling laughter and then with speech.

"Turi-Rau we hung in mats from the rafters till the smoke killed him. He was a long time dying. Parri died more swiftly, yet would he rather have lingered, as did Turi-Rau. The gods of hell alone know just how he died. I can not tell you, strangers. Yet you may some day know."

In sudden impulse Schussler turned the electric torch directly upon the chiefess. Her eyes, gleaming like crimson spangles, seemed held at gaze against her will. The head, wrinkled to a semblance of long-soaked leather, looked despite the tangle of hair like that of a monster lizard. Only the eyes were alive, sparkling like jewels laid on rotten cloth. The skin was stretched like shrunken parchment over the skull, yet retained a thousand lines, the net of age and malevolent passions. The open mouth with its horny lips gaped fangless, a crescent-shaped slit in that horrible travesty of a face. The neck was a bundle of cords, working, writhing like snakes.

For a moment she combated the glare. Then her clawlike hands covered her eyes.

"*Auwe*, the pain!" she moaned. "Take away the flame. It burns my eyes, and I am an old woman."

Hawkes picked up the head of Barr.

"This shall have burial," he said. "Perhaps the god killed him in wrath. Yet would we look upon the mask, O Mauohi!"

"I will ask of Purukau," croaked the old witch in a low voice. "The god shall answer. He will make manifestation. Sit down, while I seek for Purukau."

She drew her mats about her and bowed her head in the shadow, while the audience sat cross-legged on the mats.

The light from the floating wicks in the stone bowls failed and brightened, dimmed and flared, and the hideous carved faces seemed to peer suddenly from the darkness and shrink back again. The firelight sent long shadows quavering across the floor, and the silence deepened.

"Beats a spiritualistic *séance*," thought Hawkes, an eery feeling possessing him despite himself. What was this manifestation to be? What spirit would this modern Witch of Endor raise in this place of shadows, where the dried head of her younger brother yet lay upon the floor?

Mauohi rocked to and fro in her mats. Presently she began to moan and make little inarticulate noises. Then a slight scratching sound came from the roof. There was a general swift intake of breath, in which the white men joined involuntarily.

The scratching grew louder, passing along the ridge of the roof until it stopped apparently directly above Mauohi. A weird, whistling noise sounded from the same spot high over their heads. Then the sibillation changed to stuttering speech. The voice sounded haltingly, became indistinct. A few broken syllables changed to the whistling sound and once more ceased—and the scratching was heard retreating along the ridge until it died away.

"Eyah!" croaked Mauohi, emerging from the chrysalis of her mats. "The god has spoken. Did you hear, O *pakira* (bald-head), and thou, O tall and bold-eyed one? Is it a bargain?"

"The voice spoke of seeking and finding," answered Schussler; "of Koroa, thy granddaughter, and of death. What is the bargain, Mauohi?"

"Koroa lies close to the doors of death. The wizards have fought with Tonga for her life, but the omen-bird stopped not in its flight. There is a curse upon her, and unless it is removed she must surely die.

"Yet perhaps, O Masters of Magic, your

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gods can take her from the ghosts. Maybe your light can show a way to bring her back. That is the bargain. Break the charm that holds Koroa, and I, Mauohi, will show you the Face of Itupaoa. Is it a bargain?"

It was a clever trap. All three realized that Mauohi would not have made the offer if the girl's life were not already despaired of. She might be in the last stages of rapid consumption, where even a brief rally by the use of powerful drugs would be impossible. And yet it was a challenge. Refuse it, and they might as well leave the *pa*. Their white-man's magic would be mocked at by the tiniest child that could prattle.

Hawkes and Schussler consulted rapidly and briefly. This bridge was to be crossed now.

"Do you suppose you can cure her or rally her?" asked Hawkes.

"That iss hard to tell," said the scientist.

"We'll have to take the chance, though."

Schussler turned to Mauohi.

"If the maid still breathes tomorrow," he said, "we will see her."

"*Apopo* (tomorrow)," echoed Mauohi and her wizards. "Then we shall see—*apopo*."

"*Apopo*," answered Schussler.

CHAPTER IV

MAGIC

THE three men entered the tent together. Hawkes found the lantern, lit it, and went out, followed by the others, carrying the bedding, which they spread upon the dew-damp ground. All three seated themselves about the lantern, the light of which shone wanly beneath the brilliant moon.

A mist hung over the swamp and dulled the surface of the lake. Fleecy masses of it hid the island, and above their clinging folds the plumes of steam rose fantastically, like an assemblage of ghosts.

"B-r-r-r-r!" shivered Black. "I'm going to get some whisky."

"Bring the quinin with it," Hawkes called to him as he disappeared with the lantern in the tent.

"Well," said Black, after the quinin had been washed down with whisky and water (except by Schussler, who peeled off his little square of butter-scotch), "isn't she a wily old devil? The girl's probably as good as dead now, but you couldn't dodge the issue. It was a deadfall she rigged up."

"That was all we could do, of course—take up the challenge," said Hawkes. "What do you suppose is the matter with her?"

"I am hobing it iss nod as pad as we fear," said Schussler. "I oferheard some things in de *pa* today. De girl iss in some sort of a trance, und has peen for dree days. It iss bropably a catalebsy or maype something else I haf in mind. How old iss the girl, Black?"

"I didn't even know the old witch had a granddaughter till this morning."

"Well, we'll have to see in the morning. There was nothing else to do under the circumstances," said Hawkes. "Perhaps the girl will die overnight, and that will let us out. If we win we score high; if we lose this hand, there may be another. Do you think, Black, that Mauohi is the only one who knows of the mask's hiding-place? Has she another brother besides the one she smoked to death?"

"Rest of the family dead long ago. That Turi-Rau must have been close to eighty, to judge by his face—what the smoke had left of it to make out."

"Still," said Schussler, "she gan't eggsbect to lif much longer, und de segret iss not likely to die with her."

"One of the wizards?" suggested Hawkes. "There, by the way, is where we make enemies if we succeed with the girl."

"It's the long one who opened up your gift you'll have to look out for," said Black. "Tu-Hue. He is head priest and would succeed Mauohi if she passes out. He had charge of the girl's case. Look out for Putiri, too."

"He seemed friendly enough," said Hawkes.

"He's a pretty square chap, take it all 'round. But he was going to marry the girl Koroa, and probably has paid any amount to Tu-Hue for trying to cure her."

"Then he ought to be grateful if we do it for nothing."

"That isn't the point. If you pull her through Tu-Hue will persuade him, to save his own face, that you have bewitched her; and if he still wants to marry her he will wed a girl without a soul."

"In that case," said Hawkes, "it is more than possible that Tu-Hue will try and

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make certain of the girl dying before we can see her. We had better take watches by the gate tonight. They can't get to the grove where she is without us seeing them from here. What do you think?"

"That iss a wise idea," assented Schussler.

The Raiateans lay asleep close by the tent, swathed in their blankets, guarding the baggage. Dicky-Dick's eyes opened wide the instant Hawkes touched his shoulder, and he arose and came quietly over to the lantern.

"Dicky-Dick," said his skipper, "you know about the sick girl, Koroa?"

The sailor nodded.

"The hut where she lies is in that grove." He indicated a wooded hillock rising from the swamp not far away. "As soon as it is light I want you to go there and hide. If any one comes to see her, find out what they do, and get back without being seen."

Dicky-Dick nodded again.

"That's all, my boy. It's a grass hut. You can make a hole in the thatch if there's no window."

"All right," said the Raiatean, starting to go.

"Give him a drink," suggested Black.

Dicky-Dick's eyes glistened. He took the cup, scorned the proffered water and swallowed the raw liquor with gusto. Then he drew his blanket about him and returned to his sleeping fellows.

"What time did the moon rise tonight?" asked Hawkes.

"It shone into de *pa* yust pefore they started to dance," said Schussler. "I saw it shining on de dancers. It was nod yet nine."

"That will give us a clear two hours of darkness tomorrow night. If you can bring the girl through, Schussler, we can have a little *séance* of our own after dark. That was a weird performance tonight. Of course it was all faked, but it got under my skin somehow. I was gooseflesh all over when that thing started scratching on the roof. These native wizards could teach a first-class civilized spiritualist a lot of things."

"Vendriloquism, of course, de voice," said Schussler. "De scratching was py an assistant oudside."

"Well," said Hawkes, rising, "it's eleven now. That leaves about six hours to daylight. Two hours' watch apiece."

"I will dake de first," said Schussler. "I am nod sleeby, und I would like to think apout things."

"That's good," replied Hawkes. "You follow him, Black, and I'll take the daylight watch and see Dicky-Dick started."

WHEN Hawkes relieved Black at the gate of the *pa* at three o'clock the next morning the moon had sunk, but the glittering stars seemed to drip radiance over the sleeping village, the fern-clad cliffs and the mist-draped lake. It was cold. They were twenty-two degrees of south latitude below the Fijis, nearly thirteen below the Tropic of Capricorn. All had felt keenly the chilliness of nights embittered by the elevation.

Hawkes looked toward the silent grove where the sick girl lay and wondered at the outcome of their quest. That there were likely to be weird happenings before they won through to the mask, was evident. Black, now—he thought: Black was a tower of strength; a good man, at a council or in a fight. Schussler was strong, too, though his persistence in the search to which he was also committed was likely to cause trouble. There were breakers ahead, and shoals; that was certain. Danger that was not all of the kind a man could come to grips with. Intangible, much of it, and uncanny.

Three o'clock on a raw morning is not the most cheerful hour for meditations of this sort, and Hawkes was glad to see the stars wither in the brightening east. Before it was quite light Dicky-Dick quietly arose and came toward Hawkes with his blanket close about him, and after a word of greeting slipped silently toward the grove.

The sun came up an hour later, greedily sucking up the mists. The Raiateans awoke, made their primitive toilets with yawns and shivering stretches, and started breakfast. The fragrance of bacon and coffee, with their suggestions of the world of every-day affairs, effectually dismissed the last thought of things immaterial, and it was the familiar world once more.

After breakfast Schussler, in his character of physician, busied himself with the galvanic battery. The *pa* commenced to show signs of life, curls of smoke mounting leisurely from the courtyard. The gate was still fastened. Presently it opened and the chief wizard, Tu-Hue, came out, a companion with him, bearing something

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wrapped in a cloth. They advanced to where the white men sat at breakfast.

Hawkes carelessly covered the battery with a blanket. The wizard produced a bundle which he said was the return-gift from Mauohi. The contents were a polished calabash of hard wood in which was a small, finely polished image of greenstone, intended to be worn about the neck as an amulet; a fillet made from the feathers of the wingless *kiwi*, and three elaborately carved pipes of cream-colored clay, resembling meerschaum. Also, there was excellent native tobacco.

Thanks were made in due form and cemented with Scotch whisky, accepted with grave but evident delight by the visitors.

Nothing was said about the girl; and in a short time the pair departed, walking toward the grove.

"Not pipes of peace, I think," said Hawkes, lighting his gift. "Now to hear from Dicky-Dick."

An hour passed and the wizards returned, slackening their pace as they came near the tent.

"If they're after more whisky," said Hawkes, "I refuse to take the hint."

Tu-Hue stopped in front of him.

"When, O Master of Magic," said the wizard with an air of quiet complacency, "will you see the girl, Koroa?"

"Tell Mauohi that we shall go to the girl at the hour when the sun casts no shadow. It is permitted that we see her alone and, if we wish, bring her to the tent?"

"You are the doctors. Make your cure as you will. We shall preserve your *tabu*."

The wizard turned with his companion and left, the smile still on his features.

"Now I wonder," said Hawkes, "whether he has found the girl dead? There's Dicky-Dick already."

The Raiatean, a famous bushman among his own people, had managed to make an unseen circuit through the reeds and now sat among his comrades, looking eagerly for his summons.

All went into the tent and sat on the bedding while Dicky-Dick told with low voice but animated gesture what he had seen.

"Hut plenty small," he related; "trees plenty low. I make branch lie along down by little window and look in. The *fahine* on a bed, asleep. She look, oh, very sick. Long time I wait and then *tohungas* (wizards) they come, but not see me. The tall one, he Tu-Hue, lift up *fahine* hand and it drop along heavy, like this. He look inside her eye and then he speak to short *tohunga*, and both laugh. Tu-Hue he make ear lie along *fahine* heart and then he make plenty walk along his hands over *fahine* body—like this."

The Raiatean told his story doubly, in words and illuminating action. The first were almost unnecessary, so vividly did he pantomime the scene in the little hut with the watcher peering through the leaves.

"So!" said Schussler. "How was that, once more? When he bassed his hands ofer?"

Dicky-Dick repeated his gestures, moving his hands in long horizontal sweeps as if stroking the air smartly just above some imaginary form.

"Then," he concluded, "both *tohunga* laugh—oh, plenty; without noise. And I stay a little and come right along quick between reeds."

Schussler nodded as if in approval or confirmation of some thought.

"Good boy," said Hawkes. "Give him a drink, Black; then he can go and get something to eat." He turned to Schussler. "What do you make of it?" he asked.

"I am bretty certain it iss what I had hoped for," replied the scientist. "It was either a pad catalebtic trance or a hybnotic one, I was nearly sure. Hybnotism iss quite a gommon practise with de Maoris, for signess sometimes, und often as an oggult eggsberiment. Tu-Hue has peen unaple to pring de girl pack to gonsciousness. She will haf peen without food for seferal days, und her bulse iss brobably fery weak; so that he thinks she must die or iss already dead. But lack of nourishment matters liddle in such gases, und I shall pring her to normal with galvanic shocks und some nourishment. It iss simble. I will haf her ready for your liddle *séance* tonight, I doubt not. Und then for de pargain with Mauohi."

"You don't need us?" asked Hawkes. "Then it would be better if Black and myself put in an appearance at the *pa*. It will distract attention; and anyway, they do not expect any move from us until noon. You take Dicky-Dick and another boy. If the girl revives they can make a litter and bring her to the tent. We can *tabu* the grove and the tent by setting up wands

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with red handkerchiefs on them. Tu-Hue said he would respect the *tabus*. Meantime I can figure out the *séance* and keep an eye on the wizards if they try to do any funny business."

THE skipper and the trader spent the morning in the *pa*, watching the children at their games and looking on at a wrestling-match arranged in their honor. They kept clear of the central courtyard and saw nothing of Mauohi or her wizards, whom they imagined laughing at the attempts of the strangers to bring back the spirit of a girl after the ghosts had claimed it.

In the early afternoon Dicky-Dick came for them. They found the flap of the tent closed, with Schussler smilingly awaiting them outside by the *tabu*-wand that flaunted a red bandanna.

"It was simble," he said. "They were oud of symbathy with de subject, that's all. With a liddle rest und nourishment the girl will pe soon all right again."

"Good!" said Hawkes. "Now for our little entertainment. Black, I wish you'd take the boys and clear off the sedge from that little knoll in the swamp. Build a fire of dry *totara* branches ready for lighting—use small branches and get plenty of them; and then set out a circle of Coston night-signals about the fire. There they are in the box. Use all the colors, alternating, and show the boys how to light them when the time comes."

"Fireworks?" said Black delightedly. "That's right in my line."

"Better than that. Schussler, you can handle that stereopticon?"

"Surely."

"All right; that's fine. We'll set it up in the rushes by the tent where it can't be seen. We'll run over the program at supper so there won't be any hitch."

Later in the afternoon Black requested Mauohi to grant them an audience outside the *pa* at the hour of darkness, before the coming of the moonrise. So far they had not been interfered with. The wizards had failed to put in any appearance; only some idling natives looking on at the fire-building. The girl, Koroa, had been given soup and a stimulant in the seclusion of the tent, where she had been sleeping naturally throughout the afternoon. Black returned as supper was announced.

"She'll come," he reported. "I made quite a little excitement, though they tried to hide it. Tu-Hue and Putiri were dying to ask questions, but their pride stopped them. Tu-Hue looked as sour as green gooseberries. He's beginning to smell trouble."

"Well," said Hawkes, "we're all ready for them. Black, you start the fire the second they come out of the *pa*. Then light the Costons as fast as you can when I start to come over to you. Schussler and I will cover them with our electric torches as soon as they show outside the gate. When I switch off, Schussler will get back in the reeds and start the lantern. Better use the plain slide first and then slip in your color-film. I'll handle the phonograph. That's a peach of a record for the occasion. How's the girl?"

"She iss ready for her part," said Schussler. "I haf given her soub und a liddle prandy. When it iss time, she will be feeling well und strong. I haf told her what she iss to do, und she understands."

THE sun sank behind the rim of the great crater, and its shadow seemed to rush across land and lake as if eager to sweep the stage for the performance. Red glows showed here and there in the *pa*. The mist slowly gathered above the marsh, and the sky faded to pale green and then deepened through olive to purple. The regiments of the stars commenced their nightly bivouac, and across the zenith the flood of the Milky Way glittered like diamond-dust.

"Well," said Hawkes as the twilight vanished, "they'll be out any moment now. Time for stations."

"Aye, aye, sir!" answered Black, entering into the spirit of the affair as blithely as a boy at a Fourth-of-July celebration. "Shall I serve a tot of grog to the officers?"

He passed the bottle and they drank to success, elated at the prospect. The Raiatean boys were chattering by the clump, where the fire and the signals were ready for the word.

"Here they come," said Hawkes. "Stations. all!"

Black slipped away into the darkness as the gate of the *pa* opened, and with flaring torches a little procession filed out. First came the wizards; then Mauohi, borne shoulder high on a litter; and then the chiefs.

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A rabble of men and women followed and halted just outside the gate. The vanguard came on slowly and stopped some twenty paces from the tent.

The powerful light-sticks flashed out into the night, sweeping the little group. Eyes gleamed in the white rays; glittering ornaments caught the light.

"Greeting, O Magic-Masters!" croaked Mauohi. "Are your spells strong?"

"The gods make all things possible," answered Hawkes.

He switched off his light, and only the smoking flares from the torches broke the black of the night. Schussler stole away to the stereopticon set in the rushes.

Suddenly the fire burst into crackling, leaping flame on the little knoll, revealing the crouching figures of the Raiateans, and Black, erect and motionless.

"Now for the overture," said Hawkes below his breath, throwing the catch of the phonograph set ready behind the tent.

A weird air trembled on the night. It was a record taken by Schussler at a *souruka*-dance in the Solomons. The shrilling of the pipes, the blare of the bamboo trumpets, sounded dramatically—a perfect prelude for the scene to follow.

Hawkes crossed to the knoll. The flames had died to fierce embers that changed to vivid glares of violet, crimson and emerald as he tossed powders on the coals. Simultaneously the Costons stabbed the darkness with thrusting blades of blue and green, scarlet and silver. It was a startling spectacle. Then came a glittering upheaval from the fire in an explosion of starry particles. The boys heaped on fresh wood, revealing Hawkes, apparently tossing dazzling stars and comets from his finger-ends as he deftly lit strips of magnesium paper.

The pyrotechnic display ended, and Hawkes tossed more powder on the fire. There was a pungent scent of aromatic incense, and a dense volume of smoke arose, red at its base, rolling duskily against the sky, blotting out the stars. Not a sound had come from Mauohi and the wizards. The chiefs had drawn a little apart, while the crowd by the stockade huddled together with short, sudden cries of astonishment.

Schussler, his lantern adjusted, focused a brilliant spot on the undulating smoke column. Handling the set-screw, he dimmed the circle of radiance, and in it appeared the shadowy features of a grim, leering face, distorted, gigantic. It became clearer, the uprushing waves of smoke giving it the semblance of life—a horrible, menacing smile, frowning brows, eyes moving in dusky caverns.

He slipped a color-film in front of the slide, and the angry face turned a murky green.

"*Au-el*" yelled the crowd in terror, prostrating themselves. The chiefs fell on hands and knees, bowing their heads. The wizards shifted ground uneasily in alarm and fear.

"*Au-el*" cried the huddle at the gate. "*Au-e. Te mate a Itupaoal*"

Hawkes left the fire as the scientist darkened the lens and the face disappeared. The Raiateans threw on more wood and the diminishing smoke swept upward in ruddy waves.

"Koroa!" cried Hawkes, centering the ray of his torch on the tent. "Koroa!"

The canvas flap was thrown back and the slim shape of a girl appeared, clad in a white mat-blanket. Scarlet flowers were wreathed in the black, silky hair that tumbled over her shoulders to her waist. Koroa's lips matched the blossoms; her eyes shone in the electric rays like stars.

"Koroa!" called Mauohi harshly from the litter.

"*E kui,*" answered the girl, rushing toward her.

All was confusion. Hawkes and Schussler, reënforced by Black, turned the light-sticks on the scene—the clustering crowd by the gate; the excited chiefs, Putiri prominent among them; the perturbed wizards surrounding the girl, who stood by the litter, talking rapidly to her grandmother.

Mauohi raised her hand and called for silence.

"Your gods are powerful, strangers," she said. "Come to me tomorrow. I keep my word."

The procession formed as before and disappeared through the gateway, the girl walking by the side of the litter.

"SOME stage-manager, Hawkes," congratulated Black later, offering a nightcap. "That lantern-stunt was a bully idea. Took the wizards off their feet and got the old lady's goat, if she did try to hold on to it."

"She didn't seem overjoyed to see her granddaughter, at that," said Hawkes.

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"It iss not to pe wondered at," said Schussler. "She iss not Mauohi's granddaughter. She iss not a Maori. The girl iss a full-plooded white!"

CHAPTER V

FRAGRANCE

KOROA was a delight. Hawkes was convinced of that within twenty-four hours. Koroa, translated literally, meant the Sweet-scented One, or as the skipper rendered it, Fragrance. Now that she had been discovered to be white, he decided that she would, sooner or later, need a new name. And Fragrance, he told himself, just suited her. By which it may be readily seen that Hawkes, wittingly or not, was by way of falling in love.

She was beyond doubt a delight to gaze upon. Her skin was light golden, sun-dyed on a surface of satin which in a less sunny clime and under protection would have been white, the tint of gardenia petals. Now it held the hue of a bronze casting before the lacquer is applied.

Her slim figure, holding all the graces of the unfolding bud, was delicately rounded. The slender neck that bore the dainty, gracious little head flowed into her shoulders and breast in sweet curves that held none of the hollows or projections of immaturity. Little wrists led to slender tapering hands; the feet, guiltless of shoes, were what a sculptor would have modeled for the feet of a dryad—perfect, made for dancing over tender grasses and blossoms without touching them, only taking homage as they passed.

The face might have been the face of a dryad, too. The eyes, dark and glorious, were the hue of forest pools at midnight, holding each a captive star. They shone beneath finely penciled brows and showed by the subtle alchemy of the spirit the signals of a hundred moods.

They could be frank as a boy's; they could be pleading, proud, indignant or angry, with war-lanterns lit in warning. They could flame hotly, sparkle with merriment or glow softly with a deep and tender light—a phase they oftener bore as they looked longer and more frequently upon Hawkes. Her brow gave assurance of a well-balanced brain, a little inclined to be swayed by the emotions that the heart prompts, but the dwelling of a spirit brave and true.

The lustrous masses of her hair rippled far below the supple waist. There were two citadels where the colors of her own race hung proudly and set her apart from her companions, even to the casual eye. In her cheeks a rich bloom showed through the *patina* of sunburn, like roses seen through amber glass. Her curving lips, redeemed from fulness by the grace of their modeling held the velvety hue of the scarlet hibiscus. As to her teeth, Hawkes declared them incomparable; and he was accredited a judge of pearls.

The fragrance of her dwelt in the odors of her glossy hair, the perfume of her breath. Hawkes had never seen such a girl. He decided that, long before he had completed the catalogue of her charms. He always declared that he would have known her to be white, aside from the announcement of Schussler; and indeed, the appraisal prompted by his love was a parallel judgment of the ethnologist's practised eye.

"She iss far too light for a native of this island," Schussler said, explaining his conclusion. "De hair iss different—shabe of de eyelids, preasts, de length of de limbs, de curve of de tibia. There iss no guestion apout her race. The broblem iss, how was she adopted by Mauohi?"

"It's not unusual," answered the trader. "More frequent in earlier war-times, when they would sometimes save the white children after a raid. There are several cases on record. There was a boy who grew up with the Nga-ti-Potama tribe at Wanganui. He is in Parliament now as a representative of his tribe. They found him after a shipwreck. Koroa may have been picked up the same way.

"Mauohi seems to have respected her white blood to some extent, even if she was going to marry her to Putiri. She's not been tattooed, and she's been kept apart. I never heard of her before, and I've often been in Mauohi's settlements. Chances are we would never have seen her if Mauohi hadn't thought her dying, and tried to use her to get rid of us."

They decided, as a matter of policy, not to bring up the question of the girl's birth or parentage. There was time enough; and any present discussion of it might be resented by Mauohi, who, while carrying out her side of the bargain, was in any humor but a good one.

There had been no delay about starting

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on the last stage of the quest. With only the wait of a day, taken for the girl to recover completely, the party was made up for the trip to the crater. Four of the villagers were chosen to act as littermen for Mauohi. Tu-Hue and an assistant wizard acted with Putiri as escort, with Koroa as attendant on Mauohi.

On their side the white men balanced the native party with Dicky-Dick and the three other Raiateans. All save Hawkes, Schussler and Koroa were to stop at the entrance to the tunnel. From there on, the two men were to handle a smaller litter for Mauohi, while Koroa carried an electric torch through the caverns.

THE *pa* lay three days' hard travel behind the party. The fern-covered slopes that dropped to deep gorges had been surmounted. Great flows of lava, spreading from the crater like the arms of a monster octopus attempting to destroy the land and set with jagged waves of rock and flinty precipices, were avoided until the third day, when they paralleled one of these erupted rivers, in the heart of which lay the entrance to the tunnel.

The flow was grooved its entire length into a defile, with forbidding walls seamed by fire that curved inward. The lava was knife-edged, black and drab and slate-colored where it was not the dull red of often-heated iron, as if the volcanic fire had left its ghost behind. On the skirts of the gorge was spread lava of different formation—smoother, more porous, lying in great ropes, like monstrous entrails flung upon the dead flanks of the mountain, the bowels of the crater. Scattered here and there were fields of pumice; and, higher, fine cinders and ashes, gradually replacing the vegetation that grew to the edge of the burned-out rock and sent tentative coils and tendrils on to the barren lava itself.

On the third afternoon the caravan encamped within the bowl of a subsidiary crater some two thousand feet below the rim of Pouritangawatiriri. It was an oasis of the fast-encroaching desert of rock and cinders. Its walls, breached on opposing sides with deep notches, rose four hundred feet above the outer level and sloped within to a basin three hundred feet in depth, where a tiny lake choked the central shaft, still marked by an islet of rubble. The sides were vitrified, the basin strewn with scattered boulders of lava amid which grew stunted pines and low shrubs. Here and there gas and steam hissed and whistled from the piles of rock, and about the lake were boiling springs of terrace-formation.

By one of these Hawkes lingered with Koroa while the evening meal was prepared. Mauohi's litter had been set by the shore of the lake, close to the little encampment. Schussler and Black wandered about, looking at the fissures; the two wizards talked in undertones with their chiefess, while the Maoris and Raiateans gathered in apparent amiability over the preparations for supper.

Putiri sulked apart. Between him and Koroa were no visible signs of a mutual regard. The girl quietly avoided his company, and the chief, though scowling at the evidence of the growing intimacy between Hawkes and Koroa, made no open claim of ownership or betrothal.

The sun had sunk behind the walls of the main crater which had seemed to frown more insistently with every mile of their approach, and the land lay in shadow, though twilight promised to hold for two or three hours. The basin of the spring was reached by broad steps of white-and-rose marble, over which an inch or so of water constantly overflowed from the breaks in the lips of the bowl. The water in the basin was vividly, transparently green, welling up from unguessable depths without a bubble.

The rim was white, stained yellow here and there by sulfur-solutions. It projected far over the shaft in platforms that threatened to break under the weight of the too inquisitive. Steam hovered above some of the springs; but in this pool the water, just above blood-heat, formed a perfect mirror in which the reflected blue of the twilight sky was transmuted to emerald.

HAWKES and Koroa crept cautiously where the crust was thickest, and kneeling close together peered into the depths. From one wall was thrust an arm of lustrous spar—the trunk of a pine, its pores filled with silex, petrified. From the depths their two faces, side by side, gazed back at them—the brunette and the blond, the girl and the man.

"In pools like these," said Hawkes, "in lands far beyond the sea, dwelt water-witches, who when men came to the brink would sing to them of love, and as the men

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bent to kiss them dragged them to the depths."

"Why?" asked Koroa. "What use were the men if they were drowned?"

"If you, being a woman, can't answer your own question, I'm sure I can't," replied Hawkes. "You looked like a naiad yourself just now, looking up at me from the water."

"But I am not cruel like that; and I am not beautiful."

"I think you are," said Hawkes simply.

"How can that be?" Koroa answered. "Look at my nose. I have a canoe nose. My mother forgot to flatten it when I was a baby."

"The gods be thanked!" muttered Hawkes.

"And my hair is *ngaore* (silken, like flax)," she went on, "and I have no chin-*moko* (tattoo). Do you mind if I have no chin-*moko?*" she asked, raising her face toward him.

"Your chin is perfect," said Hawkes, a little unsteadily. He was looking at her lips, not her chin, suddenly devoured by the desire to kiss them. But there was a maidenly restraint in the very frankness of the girl that tempered the temptation.

Hawkes was falling in love, wandering in that first delicious haze of it before the self-revealing dawn. As yet he was hardly conscious of it. His interest in Koroa had been aroused by the knowledge, as yet unshared by her, of her white blood, and the speculation as to her parentage.

But so far desire for her company, the pleasure of her casual touch, had not turned to passion. The business of the mask was preëminent. A man in years and in experience, he was still much of a boy at heart. Physically he had reached the perfection of manhood, but the open under-sky life that had molded his vigor had kept him clear from the desire and the intrigues of women he considered equals. Most of his time at sea, and when ashore in civilized communities, essentially a man's man, he held pure womanhood in unsoiled reverence. As for the lures of island beauties, there were no deserted Jills hoping against hope for his return to South Sea beaches, for all his sobriquet of Handsome Harry.

With Koroa, being a woman, there may have been instincts that presaged deeper emotions. She had moments of exquisite shyness; and there were times when she flirted, if not deliberately, most effectively. Mauohi had kept her apart from the village maids, and Hawkes was the first man with whom she had come in close contact—except Putiri, who had failed, through the promptings of her white blood, to attract her. Her heart opened to Hawkes as a flower to the sun, expanding with her ripening womanhood, and all unconsciously she fastened one by one to his heart the filaments of a web that was to hold him presently a willing but thorough captive.

Every moment when Mauohi did not demand her service they spent together. Tu-Hue, as well as Putiri, noticed it, and scowled. Mauohi wrapped herself in taciturnity, as she had since they left the *pa*, keeping a baleful silence. Schussler was far too immersed in the close outcome of his quest to think of anything else. Black seemed benignly unconscious of anything out of the ordinary in their friendship. So the two foregathered unmolested through the hours.

"WHO named you Koroa?' asked Hawkes.

"Why, as is the custom, I suppose they called over all the names of my ancestors, and when they came to Koroa, I sneezed. Then everybody said, '*Maori ora*', ('Good health to you'). And so I was Koroa."

"In my tongue—" Hawkes had started to teach her English—"they would call you Fragrance."

"Fara—araganni—is that right?" she asked, with tantalizing curvings of her dainty mouth. Perhaps she was not so unmindful of the windings of the rosy path they were treading together. So much that is called love-making is with a woman merely instinct that it is hard to mark the line of deliberate intention. The Maori idiom for sweetheart is that used almost universally throughout Polynesia, a compound word meaning "ripe fruit;" and such was Koroa—a luscious, fragrant fruit, ripe for the gathering. Now in the urge of the greatest of world-energies, sex, she had found her mate—happily for her a worthy one; and both she and her lover-to-be were unwittingly obeying the impulse of a force far too dominant for their control.

"How old are you?" he asked. "Do you know?"

"Why, of course I do," she answered,

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laughing. "*Ka-ti-kau-ma-iwa* (nineteen). And you?"

"Oh, I am very old. *Tou-ru-te-kau* (thirty)."

"That is not old," she said demurely. "Mauohi is more than three times *tou-ru-te-kau*. She is more than *rau* (a hundred). And a woman is always older than a man," she added archly.

BLACK strolled up, whistling.

"Supper's ready," he said, "and the old lady's peevish. Ain't you folks hungry? I am."

"Hari," said Koroa, as they walked toward the lake," I am afraid of Mauohi."

"Isn't she kind to you?"

"Oh, always. Only, sometimes she sits and looks at me strangely, and she has never let me talk much with the other girls. She is more that way of late. But I am not afraid for myself, but—for you, Hari, for you and Paraki and the Bald One. She looks at you with evil eyes, and talks often with Tu-Hue when we are alone. They speak low, but I have heard some things that do not mean well for you."

"We'll be all right, Fragrance. You mustn't worry."

"Ah, you are brave and strong, Hari. But she is very old and very wise and very cruel; and—though I should not say it—very wicked to those she does not like."

She looked at the stalwart man beside her, head and shoulders above her slender height, with alarm that changed to confidence as he smiled into her eyes. He was very noble, this stranger, she thought, and —oh, it was strange and sweet!—but surely he liked her more than a little, as she liked him. And she dropped her heavily fringed lids before his glance.

"What about Putiri?" he asked. "They say you are to marry him."

"Young girls are often pledged to chiefs in marriage," the girl answered. "Putiri is the head chief of the *pa*, and when Mauohi dies he will be *rangatira*. Mauohi wishes me to wed him, she says; and I think perhaps," she went on with a touch of coquetry, "he loves me. He has said so. Mauohi thinks she will soon pass to the land of ghosts and wants to see me protected; but she would not have me wed against my wish, and indeed I have no thought of marriage."

"Never?"

He held her gaze till her cheeks flushed like ripened pomegranates.

"If I had, would I talk of it?" she answered bravely.

"WE GO through the tunnel at night to save time," announced Hawkes to Schussler and Black, after a conference with Mauohi. "The way Mauohi figures it, allowing a full day to cross and recross the crater, we should be back here in thirty-six hours, barring slips. If we don't show up in forty-eight, come after us with the boys. If I can I'll manage to mark the right path through the tunnel in some way with a chunk of this pipe-clay stuff, to guide you."

"I'll get through," said the trader, "if I have to make Tu-Hue act as guide by the use of a little physical persuasion."

CHAPTER VI

UNDER THE GEYSER

THE next morning found the little crater bedded down under a fleece of white mist through which the sun failed to break until eight o'clock, when the fog quickly dissipated, pouring out through the notches in the brim. The night had been cold at the altitude of five thousand feet, but camped about the warm springs they had not suffered. They were to pass the next night in similar comfort, Mauohi told them, at some hot mud springs at the end of the tunnel.

The Maoris were busy transforming the litter into a narrower couch, more readily transported by two bearers. Handles were arranged so that it could be carried at arm's length through the narrow places in the tunnel.

It was planned that they were to start at noon, traveling in company to the tunnel mouth and sharing the evening meal before dividing. Travel through the tube was to be made at night; more expeditiously with the light sticks, and more comfortably in the lower temperature.

Koroa spent the morning arranging thonged sandals, made from dried *ti*-leaves, which were to protect her feet from the harsh lava. The rest of the party, aside from the white men and Mauohi, had the same footgear, in readiness for the final stage of their escort.

"I'll give you folks the forty-eight hours,"

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said Black in final conference; "then I'll come after you. If there's trouble—I'm out of favor with the old lady, that's evident—I can handle the opposition very nicely with Dicky-Dick and your boys."

"They'll stick," said Hawkes.

"I'm sure of it. Now I've said about all I'm going to say on the subject of Mauohi; but as sure as you try and touch that mask, trouble is going to pop out from where you least expect it. And the old she-devil is banking on your doing just that thing. It don't look dangerous on the face of it—two men against a helpless old rheumatic; but you don't know what kind of a trap you may be walking into. Barr's head and the smoking of her own brother show there is danger. She's as cunning as an old gray bitch-wolf."

They reached the mouth of the tunnel after four hours of stiff travel along the bed of the lava ravine, which was a great open conduit that had once held the molten contents of the subterranean passage. This channel they entered by a gap torn by the explosion of pent gases, and marched in the shadow of the ever narrowing cliffs.

The crater-wall reared itself constantly higher as they toiled tediously along the gorge. The irregular floor seemed the bed of a dried-up torrent, as if a flood of storm-waters, rather than a fiery river, had possessed it. There were high, smooth rocks over which the lava had cascaded in incandescent falls, terraces where the glowing current once swirled in fierce rapids. Sharp edges tore through shoe-leather, and twice the sandals of the marchers were renewed. The legs of the natives were soon cut and bleeding, and Koroa's dainty ankles received their share of painful scratches for all of Hawkes' watchful pilotage.

Camp was made at dark beside a deep pool of icy water, a short way from the opening in the wall of the volcano. The cliffs of the gorge had gradually lowered, and beyond the jagged edges could be seen mounds of scoriæ and slag. The fence of a deserted hut supplied them with fuel, and the snapping flames shone fiercely in the swiftly gathering gloom.

High above them, beyond the crater's rim, the sunset glowed in a vision of the days when the great *caldera* had belched fire as it spewed its awful contents. The lofty walls were deep chocolate in color in the twilight, the rifts marked by dark purple shadows. All vestiges of vegetation had been left behind. By the Stygian pool, amid the abomination of desolation all about them, with the ragged mouth of the tunnel gaping in the dark wall of the crater, the general atmosphere was anything but enlivening.

"See!" croaked Mauohi. "See the redness of the sky! Maui bleeds. It is an omen, O Magic-Masters. Yet, since the Face of Itupaoa comes at thy will, there can be naught to fear. Let us be going."

"Putiri is going to camp back in the little crater with Tu-Hue and the rest," said Black to Hawkes, "but I shall stay here with our boys. We have plenty of grub and the water's good. Good-by, and good luck."

Hawkes and Schussler took up the handles of the litter. The blankets were piled as a bed for Mauohi, and the provisions stowed at her feet. Koroa timorously bore a light-stick with which she walked beside the litter, lighting their way through the grim gullet of the mountain.

At first the tunnel was some twelve feet in even diameters, narrowing to almost half those dimensions at times, or opening into great circular chambers where crystals glittered from roof and walls. The latter were fairly smooth, bossed here and there with blisters, or split where the lava had contracted after the fiery core had swept on. Blisters were on the uneven floor—brittle, broken and knife-edged; but the quartet made good progress, halting sometimes for rest. The torch sought out a pathway that was easy to follow, and the air was fresh and cool, without perceptible draft.

At one halting-place the light revealed bundles of yellow bones protruding through rotten matting, set on shelves in the wall at head-level. Mauohi took no note of these grim relics, but Koroa shivered and crept close to Hawkes, her hand stealing to meet his as they leaned resting against the wall together beside the litter.

It was eight o'clock when they entered the tunnel. At eleven the tube became so low that they were forced to stoop, and in some places crawl painfully through openings that barely admitted of passage, dragging the litter with them as best they might. Despite the mats Mauohi's old bones were bumped and jarred severely, but she made no complaint. The hands and knees of the men were torn, and Koroa's pretty knees

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bleeding when they won through the last of these lava straits. Soon Hawkes, who was at the head of the litter, felt a cool breeze on his wet forehead as the torch-ray raised a sudden reflection from the still waters of an ebon pool lying in the center of the floor of a vast chamber.

At Mauohi's directions they set down the litter, while the girl swung the light about the vaulting walls. Six dreary portals yawned before them, dull-fanged mouths leading to unknown labyrinths.

"Which way, Magic-Masters?" cried the hag. "Which way? Or do you need my help?"

"It is in your bargain to guide," replied Hawkes sternly.

"I keep my word. To the end! Six ways to choose from, and five that lead to death. Nay, all of them perhaps. Who knows? We take the second road, strangers—the narrowest. Soon we shall reach the threshold of Tewhareara (House of the Sun) and rest for the night. Come, Magic-Masters! Come, Koroa! The night hastens."

As they passed the margin of that midnight pool, Hawkes saw two points of light glowing in the depths like the eyes of a water-dragon of the palæozoic age. Looking upward, he saw two stars in a sky of black velvet, so black that no dividing-line showed where the mass of the crater-wall had been torn asunder.

"*Kanohi a Maui* (Eyes of Maui)," said Mauohi. "They look red. Perhaps he is angry. Who knows? Who knows?"

She chuckled, subsiding into silence as they stumbled along the narrow way that led downward, like some corridor of a forgotten pyramid leading to the crypt of an unremembered king. At one side of the entrance Hawkes scrawled a crude cross with pipe-clay as he passed, marking the way for Black if he should follow.

The cool wind blew upon them once more as the passage widened rapidly to a ravine open to the starry sky. They looked out upon the floor of the great *caldera*, an easy slope of ashes at their feet descending into its void. The vast pit was filled with a sea of fog, rising to their feet—an ocean of mist that stirred uneasily beneath the moon. The black barrier of the farther wall above the fog abruptly ruled off the starry heavens. After the gloom of the tunnel, the stars seemed to thrust spear-points of light at them. The Milky Way blazed like a great snake set with diamond-crusted scales.

"To the right," croaked the crone. "To the right."

Gases had blown out a huge cavern in the wall of the cañon. The interior was hot and steamy, and great sobs and gurglings sounded weirdly from its depths.

Mauohi chuckled constantly, in an excitement that was steadily growing with each stage of the journey.

"Listen!" she said. "The voices of the ghosts of hell! They will keep us brave company tonight. Halt and set me down. There is wood yonder, if you want a fire."

Despite the heat the suggestion was a cheerful one in those mysterious surroundings, with the protesting, choking sobs sounding from the gloom. The light-sticks revealed a grass house by the wall of the cavern, its thatch rotted, its palisade half demolished. Hawkes attacked the broken fence, and soon the *totara*-posts were in flames, lighting up the rough ribs and groins of the place with a ruddy, shifting glow.

Heaps of coarse tufa stood about, rough mounds that might have been the burial cairns of giants. From their interiors seemed to come the sobs, less supernatural now in the company of the leaping fire. Schussler ascended one of them while Hawkes helped Koroa spread the mats on a smooth spot of the floor.

"Gome up here, Hawkes," said the scientist, "und pring your torch."

Hawkes clambered up the porous heap of dried mud and stood by his side.

"Here iss one of de gods of hell," said Schussler. "A goot name, *hein?*"

In a basin nearly a hundred feet across, boiled a viscous mass of mud. In the center of the caldron a great bubble slowly formed, rising sluggishly, its inverted bowl darkly iridescent in the electric rays. The dome, easily fifteen feet across, held its shape as it attained the perfect half circle, swelled in a final effort and burst with a hollow choking sound, sending a jet of liquid mud high into the air to slap back into the scalding mass in heavy gouts.

"This will be the beginning of the hell Black talked about," commented Hawkes.

"Well, we shall pe out of it soon," said Schussler. "This time tomorrow, und we shall pe pack here again, I hope."

"Hope so," assented Hawkes. "Let's turn in sharp after supper. We'll get a long rest for tomorrow. That fog outside should

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hold till well after sun-up, and all the sleep we can get will help."

The hasty meal was soon disposed of, and Mauohi, tucked under her blankets by Koroa, soon gave evidence of sleep as she snorted and strangled like one of her own favorite hell-godlings. Koroa lay quietly beside her, and, as Hawkes lay down on the narrow space of level floor they had found, her little hand nestled into his upturned, ready palm.

BETWEEN eight and nine next morning the last of the fog was driven through a great gap in the eastward wall of the crater. The fleecy clouds were swept between a score of minor *calderas*, like sheep before Phœbus playing shepherd. Soon only a few thin streamers clung to the crests of the smaller cones like wraiths of their long-dead fires.

The great pit was a wilderness of trailing lava rivers winding between the lesser craters. Great slopes of ashes were piled against precipitous cliffs, fissured and torn, glaring in every shade of dull red and yellow, as if still holding the heat of the furnace that formed them.

Blocks of fire-twisted, burned-out rock lay in confusion everywhere, taking strange shapes. Here was a heap of skulls, there a great turtle or lizard, as if the monsters of a past age had chosen the spot for a death-ground. There was no sign of life, no growth of any kind, no sound of beast or bird or insect. Silence brooded about the lofty cliffs. It was a hall of hell, deserted.

Five miles away, by the northern wall, arose intermittent jets of vapor.

"The geysers?" asked Hawkes.

"*Ja*," assented Schussler. "If it were not for them und their evidence of water, this would pe a tybical lunar landscape."

He adjusted his field-glasses and made a cheerful, careful survey of the place.

"Not so vast as the crater of Haleakala on Maui, in the Hawaiians," he announced. "Half de elefation und apout half de size, put one of de piggest eggstinct *calderas* in de world. Und de name, Tewhareara, iss de same. Another broof that the Maoris gome from that group."

Their feet sank ankle-deep into the ashes that turned up sulfur-yellow beneath the weathered crust as they trudged across the breadth of the silent crater. The sun was reflected fiercely from the vitrified rock and sand, and they were often forced to long détours about the lava-flows that arose in flinty billows high above their heads. Before long they could hear the roar of the great fountains and presently came upon them, grouped upon a terraced plateau of cream-colored siliceous stone. Hawkes counted seven in action as they neared them, but there were many evidences of jets more rarely intermittent. As they set the litter down, the ground shook and a mighty fountain of spray shot into the air, rainbows glittering on the steaming column, the spray pluming far to leeward.

"*Eyah!* Te Pakiki (The Stubborn One)," cried Mauohi. "Te Pakiki, always faithful to his trust. He is the Guardian of the Mask. Close to his heart lies the Face of Itupaoa. Will you seek it, O strangers? Is your magic strong, or are you afraid?"

The two men looked at each other, wondering if the old hag was insane or actually meant that they should venture into the very throat of the geyser. Unless it was a trick to foil them at the last and put an end to the search.

"Nay, I am not mad," she chuckled, reading their faces, "and I will keep my word. But be sure you do no more than gaze. Te Pakiki is a vengeful watcher, but he will let Mauohi pass."

A lesser jet broke from the terraces beyond where the giant crater had belched, followed closely by another to the right; the ground shook and the subsiding waters rumbled as they sank into their shafts.

"Koroa," said Mauohi sharply, "stay here till I return."

The girl, trembling with fear of the awesome place, looked pleadingly at Hawkes.

"Till *we* return," he amended. "Yes, Fragrance, it will be best. Till we return. We shall not be long."

"That is as the gods decide," croaked the witch. "Come, bear me to the mouth of Te Pakiki and wait till he speaks once more. Then we must work swiftly."

"De geyser iss efidently regularly intermittent," said Schussler. "We should time it carefully."

Hawkes took out his watch and noted the time. It was eleven-forty.

THEY bore the litter close to the lips of the great gullet and looked into its depths. The gaping throat contracted funnelwise, smooth-sided, thirty

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feet in diameter at the orifice. About twenty feet down a narrow shelf ran around the shaft. From this, on the opposite side to where they stood, showed the dark mouth of an opening fringed with pendent stalactites. Its interior was in deep shadow, as the noonday sun shone directly into the gulf.

"Under that ledge should be ropes and a plank," said Mauohi. "Turi-Rau told me he left them there, and he was past lying when he spoke," she chuckled.

Beneath a ledge of the terrace they found two stout cords of twisted flax, each some eight fathoms, and knotted at regular intervals. The plank was a slab of *totara*-pine two feet in width, in good condition, and strong, though light. The ground commenced to tremble as they bore them toward the mouth of the geyser.

"Pakiki comes," said Mauohi.

"Twelve ten. About thirty minutes' interval. I'll time it again," said Hawkes. "I suppose that cave is the entrance to the altar where the mask is."

"Now strangers, swiftly!" cried Mauohi, as the glittering column subsided. "Lower me first and then you will not fear to follow."

Hawkes swiftly knotted the ropes about the ends of the litter, and the two men swung it above the shaft with its light burden of Mauohi's shrunken body. They lowered her to the shelf, fastening the ends of the cord securely about a hummock of marble. The light plank easily reached the ledge, its end projecting a foot or more above the mouth of the shaft. There was a length of rope attached to it by which it was to be lowered, drawbridge-fashion, across the gulf. Deep niches had been carved in the soft stone of the shaft and, with the knotted ropes acting as hand-rails, Schussler easily descended hand under hand to the side of Mauohi. Hawkes followed quickly, smiling at Koroa, who crouched mute and forlorn on the ground, watching the face of the man she loved disappear, as she believed, forever.

The plank spanned the shaft and its farther end rested within the cave-entrance. Hawkes detached the ropes from the litter and they rapidly bore it across, not daring to glance below. Setting down the hag once more, they dragged the light plank into the passage, standing back to avoid the next eruption.

"Wait until Pakiki passes," said Mauohi. "Then set back the plank. It is dangerous to stay too long within, and it is but a short distance to the altar of the god."

Hawkes looked at her suspiciously. It looked as if the witch might be preparing a way of retreat which, however, would be useless to her without their help. Or she might be planning to shorten their stay so that they would be unable to find time in which to bear off the mask. Still, there might be interior conditions that would prevent their remaining. Another geyser perhaps, spouting between alternate eruptions of Pakiki.

"Be not afraid," said Mauohi. "Do I not go with you, and am I not helpless?"

Hawkes turned to Schussler, who had evidently shared his suspicions. The scientist nodded and bent to pick up the plank.

The cavern walls began to tremble violently and a hissing roar came from the shaft. Hawkes hastily consulted his watch.

The entrance to the cavern and the opposite wall were suddenly blotted out by the rush of water surging upward, deafening them with the sound of its going, which reverberated in the passage until it seemed as if their ear-drums would split. The air was charged with suffocating steam, replaced refreshingly by cool air once more as the torrent fell back, rumbling sullenly.

"Twelve forty. Exact half-hour intervals," announced Hawkes.

"The plank! Set back the plank!" cried Mauohi. "And hasten!"

They replaced the bridge and took up the litter. Hawkes carried the light-stick beneath his armpit, and they started down the passage.

STALACTITES hung halfway from the roof; stalagmites thrust up to meet them. Many of the latter were broken off close to the base, marking the trail of previous visitors. The way led downward at a perceptible angle, and, heedful of the scant half hour of grace, they made swift progress. Some five hundred feet from the shaft the passage forked, and they followed the right-hand tine along the trail marked by the broken columns. The passage curved widely and the echoes of their trampling feet resounded as they swung rapidly along. Abruptly the floor sloped upward for thirty feet or more, and

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the air grew chilly as they entered a great central chamber of the cliff.

"Set me down," commanded Mauohi.

The rays of both torches disclosed a circular hall, high-vaulted, its walls pierced by several openings. Everything, walls, floor and ceiling, gleamed creamy-white, surfaced with the glaze of siliceous deposits, arabesqued in an indistinct tracery of strange patterns. Great clusters of stalactites descended midway to meet their upstanding brethren. In one place they had blended to form a set of slender columns shaped like the pipes of a mighty organ. Groups of stouter pillars stood about, and everywhere the limestone responded to the electric flares with milky, opalescent lights. The drip of falling water resounded in a constant tattoo.

"What iss de time?" asked Schussler.

"Twelve forty-seven," answered Hawkes, and the scientist set his wrist-watch to correspond. They had been only seven minutes coming from the shaft, though it had seemed twice as long.

Outside, above the roof with its chandelier-like clusters of lime-incrustation, the sun was blazing on the dead crater, making rainbows in the leaping fountains of the geysers. Here was coolness, absolute darkness, save for their torches—silence, except for the ceaseless tapping of the water; death, perhaps, for Barr had lost his venture here and they might themselves be close to their last, losing hazard.

"We can't count on more than ten minutes," said Schussler. "Iss this de blace?" he asked, eagerness breaking through the restraint of his voice.

"Listen, strangers!" replied the ancient crone. She was leaning on one arm, her eyes lit with crimson fire as they shone in the torchlight. "Listen!"

She gave out a shrill cry—"I-tu-pa-O-A-A-A!" dwelling on the last two syllables in a high insistent note.

The chamber thrilled with resonant tone as if some mighty harp had suddenly responded. It filled the vault with strange music that slowly trembled into silence. As it died some stalactites broke, tinkling to the floor.

"The voice of the god!" proclaimed Mauohi. "The voice of Itupaoa! He is present. Quick!" she added to Hawkes. "There in the wall are torches; light them!"

Piled in a recess were resinous splinters of *totara*, protected from the water by the depth of the niche. Among the close-standing stumps of a broken stalagmite-cluster stood the end of a burned brand. Hawkes replaced it with a fresh bough and ignited it, the pitchy torch flaring up and adding a red glow to the pale reflections of the spar.

"Where is de mask?" demanded Schussler.

"Nay, there is plenty of time in which to look," replied Mauohi. And if you are wise, O Magic-Masters, you will but look and swiftly leave."

"Where is it, woman?" demanded Hawkes.

"There," she said, pointing a skinny finger. "Enter and behold the altar of Itupaoa. Look upon the face. I have kept faith."

At the far end of the chamber a narrow rift appeared in what seemed to be the solid wall. Hawkes looked doubtfully at the crone, then stooped to take up the litter.

"There is no room for me to pass," she croaked. "Let one of you go and the other stay with me, if you fear a helpless old woman."

"Six minutes left," said Hawkes.

Schussler had already disappeared within the fissure.

Suddenly the wall was illuminated, translucent to the light of the torch, revealing itself as a thin screen of chalcedony that glowed like the heart of an opal, the splendid reredos of this savage shrine.

"*Ach, Gott!* Hawkes, come here," called the scientist.

With a glance at the witch, still resting on one arm, her malevolent eyes spangled in the light of the flaring *totara*-torch, Hawkes hastened behind the stone curtain.

Hidden by the skirting sheet of chalcedony was a space some twenty feet square. In the rear a deep hollow, natural perhaps at first, had been carved into a deep embrasure. Before it stalactites and stalagmites formed a bristling grille. Some of the latter were broken as if an attempt had been made to penetrate the barrier. They threatened at all angles in a protecting though brittle *chevaux-de-frise*. Behind them, upright on a flat slab of beveled lava, gleamed the object of their quest, the leering, malicious face, the duplicate of the wooden mask of Miru, carved in pale emerald stone. The altar-slab itself was of lava,

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stained darker than its natural hue by the blood of sacrifice that had dripped from a thousand victims, and held a dull groove in which the blood had flowed.

"The mask!" exclaimed Hawkes.

The gleaming face showed brilliant in the electric glare. The jade held a peculiar quality of light, as if the carving had been made from green ice. The god glowered hideous, threatening, sardonic—a masterpiece of heathen carving, a treasure well worth the finding.

"Look, but touch not!" the voice of Mauohi sounded faintly from behind the screen.

Schussler was gazing intently at the limestone bars of the grille. Evidently the mask had been set upon its altar-slab long ago, and the slow in-forming incrustations had grown through the slow centuries, drop by drop, undisturbed save by the hands of Barr, which had in some mysterious way been arrested while they worked.

"Look here, Hawkes," he said. "Here iss something strange." The tips should be fresh and white—but they are brown. Ach, don't touch!"

Hawkes looked at the points of the spikes. They seemed to have been smeared with a brown, greasy substance. His mind jumped quickly to experiences with South Sea weapons.

"Poison!" he said.

"I think so," answered Schussler. "It will dake time to preak them away. We had better get in that pridge."

Hawkes had already slipped past the curtain to the chamber. It was empty. The torch had been extinguished; the litter lay untenanted. Mauohi had trapped them after all. Her inability to walk had been assumed from the first in the hope of this opportunity. She had fled to the entrance, hoping to cross the bridge unnoticed while they were engrossed in the mask, leaving them to starvation if they escaped the poisoned stalactites.

THERE was a faint sound of a chuckling laugh in dimly reverberating echoes dying in the distance. Hawkes thought rapidly.

There was surely time to stop her—shoot her, if necessary—before she could cross the plank. He looked about the vault. Which was the opening? He tried one that ended abruptly in a *cul-de-sac*. Another led to a wide rift from which sounded the rush of waters far below. Another and another he tried before he entered the right passage, strewn with the broken stalagmites.

He glanced at his watch as he ran, leaping among the shattered spikes of spar. The minute hand had passed to five beyond the hour, leaving less than five minutes in which to cross to reach the plank and circumvent Mauohi. He thrust back the watch and grasped his automatic pistol.

Perspiration streamed into his eyes, blinding him as he quickened his pace, spurred by the thought of their peril, cursing himself for not paying closer heed to Black's warning, cursing the crone who had trapped them.

He hurried at top speed up the ascent, following the wide curve, and came at last to where the entrance to the shaft of the geyser shone like a great eye. Close to the mouth of the passage hobbled Mauohi with incredible swiftness. As he looked, she tossed her torch aside and flakes of fire broke from the brand where it struck the wall. Still in his stride, Hawkes fired. The report thundered in the corridor. Shattered stalactites, shaken down with the concussion, fell all about him and others, splintered by the spurting bullets, showered about the flying witch.

Mauohi staggered and kept on, suddenly pitching to her hands and knees as she reached the bridge, over which she started to scramble like an ape. Across the gulf swung the cords by the steps cut in the shaft. It seemed impossible that she could clamber to the top, and yet——

The premonitory quivering of the rocks commenced. A rumble grew to a hissing roar and Mauohi's shriek, as she clung to the plank, was lost in the explosive gush of the seething mass of liquid that surged upward, whirling the plank and its screaming burden from the floor of the passage, smashing the fringe of stalactites from the entrance as it went and filling the air with a steamy fog.

Hawkes shrank back, protecting his face with his arm from sight and danger. The flood fell growling to its abyss. The mist cleared, leaving the narrow shelf adrip with moisture. There was no sign of Mauohi, no remaining splinter of the plank bridge. The ropes had disappeared, torn loose by the torrent. The way of retreat was cut off.

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CHAPTER VII

KOROA TAKES A MESSAGE

HAWKES pulled himself together, his shaken nerves responding once more to his will. Still shuddering at the thought of Mauohi's fate and his own narrow escape, he set himself to the full realization of their position. The plank and ropes were irretrievably lost. To leap across the shaft and land in safety on the narrow shelf, slippery with water, was impossible. The constantly falling torrent had worn away the ledge till it sloped toward the gulf, and if he failed to hold his balance his spirit would speedily join Mauohi's in whatever grim anteroom that malignant soul was now waiting.

The distance, too, was prohibitive. There was no take-off; the jump was not to be thought of. But there was Koroa—if he could attract her attention. He pictured her beholding the awful spectacle of Mauohi, hurled aloft. He never for an instant doubted the girl's loyalty, though she was still ignorant of the fact that Mauohi had not been of her own kith and kin.

He retraced his steps, studying over the situation. The mask was theirs. Mauohi's trap had sprung upon herself. It had not been so subtle after all, relying, as it did, upon her getting away while they were gazing at the mask. Still, but for his wounding her, she might have clawed her way to the rim, and then Koroa would have been helpless to aid them. Koroa now could go back for help, and Black would be starting out for their relief the next day.

A light still glowed behind the transparent screen and projected upon it the shadow of Schussler, rising and falling to a sound as of breaking heavy glass.

As Hawkes stepped through the opening, he saw the scientist, his great head and face beaded with sweat, striking carefully at the upper stalactites with one of the poles from the litter. A heap of shattered limestone was scattered at his feet.

"Ach!" he said, as the last spike tinkled down. "Did you fix de pridge?"

Hawkes told him briefly what had happened.

"I did not hear de shots," said Schussler. "I made too much noise here, und I was excited. So! De old she-wolf iss dead? But we haf de mask, and I shall brove my theories, and you, my friend, shall haf many thousands of pounds to spend."

"Pretty slim chances of spending it," said Hawkes grimly, "unless we get in touch with Koroa. Black would never find us here.

"I'm going back to the entrance," he added. "Can you get the thing out all right?"

The mask, with the wealth it represented, seemed of small account to him then. He was worried about Koroa. The girl might have fainted from the shock, or might through superstitious dread have fled from the place, convinced of their destruction.

"*Ja*, surely," said Schussler. "I shall manage." The scientist's face beamed with enthusiasm as he played his torchlight on the leering face of the mask. He was lost to all matters of personal safety for the time.

Hawkes retraced his steps to the mouth of the cave. As he followed the upward curve of the corridor he heard the thunder of the eruption.

At the opening, looking up to the orifice of the pit, preparing to call to Koroa, he saw the face of the girl peering fearfully into the shaft.

"Hari!" she cried, "Oh, Hari! You are safe?"

"Safe so far," he said, "if we can get out of this. Listen, Koroa. If I throw you a light-stick, can you find your way back through the tunnel to Black and tell him to bring the men and planks, or a rope?"

"Yes, Hari! But, oh, Hari! Mauohi!"

"Never mind her, Koroa. She wasn't your grandmother at all."

"Not my —— Why, what do you mean?"

"I mean that you are not Maori. You are a white girl, as white as I am."

"Hari!" she cried, her eyes widening. "I am white? How can you know?"

"I'll tell you all later," said Hawkes. "The fact is, dear, that you are white. There's no doubt of it. So you will go to Black, and hasten; for there is no water here fit to drink. Get some of the food and throw it to me."

Koroa disappeared, and Hawkes wrapped his handkerchief carefully about the lens of the torch.

"There, Hari," said the girl, reappearing. She managed to toss into the opening some cans of tomatoes, one of beef, and some ship's biscuits. One or two attempts failed

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and the food fell into the shaft to join the body of the old hag where it swirled into the hidden depths.

"Good girl!" said Hawkes. "Don't try and catch this." And he tossed up the torch.

"Is it all right?" he asked anxiously.

"Yes," said Koroa. "It shines. Now I go, Hari. Good-by."

HAWKES found Schussler in the main chamber. He had relighted the torches and was wrapping the mask carefully in the mats of Mauohi's litter.

"Koroa's on her way," said Hawkes. "She ought to make the other end of the tunnel in eight hours. Black'll get to the crater long before dawn, and he can start as soon as the fog clears. They'll be here by noon, I reckon.

"Here's some grub," he continued. "Good thing we brought those tomatoes along. The pulp'll do instead of water. I suppose we shouldn't touch this in here."

"Not unless we want to be betrified in our insides," said Schussler. He was in high good humor as he finished protecting the prize they had come so far to seek.

"I'm afraid Black'll have trouble with Tu-Hue and Putiri," said Hawkes, "but we'll win out all right now we've got this far."

They made a fire of the litter-frame and the torchwood, and sat about it to eat their meal. Afterward they went back to the shaft, discussing the events of the day and the probability of escape, until the night fell and a few stars shone into the pit.

"Do you suppose Barr was poisoned?" asked Hawkes.

"It iss hard to say. Maybe he saw de trick of de poison as we did, but was left to starve. So I think, for he surely made de drawing of de mask und de last of his notes in here; that would take time—more time than if he had been poisoned. So he was trapped, for he had no Koroa to go for help."

"There's no doubt about the girl being white, is there?" asked Hawkes.

"I would stake my rebutation on it," assured Schussler. "Bresently her sunpurn shall go when she lives in the cities, und you shall see."

Hawkes' thoughts dwelt pleasantly on the thought of Koroa in the cities, in some city where he could watch her returning to the hue of her birthright.

"We should gif her an endowment from de brofits, for her education," said Schussler. "She is a goot girl."

AFTER dark they retreated to the grotto and ate their supper, reserving enough food for the morning. Hawkes shared the mats with Schussler and turned in.

Long after midnight he awoke, startled at the strangeness of the place. The fire was low, but the glow from Shussler's torch drove back the gloom as the scientist sat by the embers, gloating over the mask which he had taken from its coverings.

Hawkes closed his eyes again to dream of many things—which later proved to have been prophetic—as to what he was going to do with his share of the "brofits." Neither was Koroa absent from his visions.

After breakfast they went once more to the mouth of the shaft, waiting, while the geyser erupted at its half-hour intervals, for sounds of rescue.

Eight times it spouted and fell, and the next eruption was close at hand when they heard the cheery hail of Black and saw him standing at the top of the shaft, Dicky-Dick's welcome face grinning down as he knelt beside the trader on the rim.

"Stand back!" shouted Hawkes. "Look out for the geyser!"

Black waved his hand and both stepped back, reappearing as soon as the waters had fallen.

"Have you ropes and a plank?" asked Hawkes. "There are steps cut in the shaft."

"Everything," said Black cheerily. "Koroa explained."

The lines and the plank were quickly adjusted, and Schussler clambered up to the crater-floor. Hawkes remained on the ledge until a line was lowered, which he carefully fastened to the mask, wrapped in its bundle of mats. This Schussler carefully hauled to the top, while Hawkes followed.

The Raiateans surrounded their skipper with eager cries of welcome, but he hurried through them to where Koroa sat up on a litter, weak but smiling wanly.

"Hari! Hari!" she cried, clinging to his hand as he knelt beside her, and bursting into sobs mingled with excited laughter.

"There, there, Fragrance!" he said, soothing her while he drew her head to his breast

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and placed a supporting arm about her, smoothing back her hair. "It's all right now."

She strove to catch her breath.

"Mauohi! I hate her! I'm glad she's killed. I'm glad I saw her die." Her eyes flashed as she straightened in his clasp. "And she was not my grandmother, after all."

Black questioned Hawkes with a glance.

"Yes, I told her," said Hawkes. "I suppose we'd better get something to eat and be off. We're not clear yet, by long odds."

They snatched a hasty meal while the Raiatean boys got ready for the journey out of the crater. The precious mask was carefully slung to a pole to be carried on the shoulders of two of the sailors, while the others bore the litter.

"Of course we can't go back through the tunnel," said Black. "Too risky. We must try and work out through the eastern gap and strike one of the coast-bound rivers. When we get to a *pa* I'll negotiate for a canoe. I'm pretty well known, and if we can get well started before there's wind of this affair we'll get clear. There's no time to lose, though."

"Did you haf much trouple?" asked Schussler.

"Some," said the trader laconically. "I'll tell you later. After we get moving."

The Raiateans replaced their worn-out sandals with substitutes contrived from spare matting. Two of them took up the litter and two the mask, and the caravan set out along the shadow of the crater-wall. Hawkes walked by the litter until Koroa fell into a doze. Then he joined Black at the head of the little procession.

"You see," said the trader, "I was suspicious of Tu-Hue and Putiri. That is why I wanted to camp at the pool instead of going back with them to the little crater. Mauohi had plainly made up her mind that I was not to be counted on her side, and Tu-Hue and Putiri naturally followed her lead.

"I had figured out that Barr was killed somehow in the crater, and that Turi-Rau was made prisoner and brought back with Barr's head to the *pa* by Tu-Hue or some of his crew; and I rather thought that he hoped to perform that office for you and Schussler, in which case I would also be counted with the missing.

"Tu-Hue didn't half like leaving us at the pool, and as I didn't know what he might be up to in the small hours I set watches last night, Dicky-Dick and one of his boys going on guard till midnight, when they woke me. I didn't tell you, because I wasn't sure, but I was pretty certain that at least two rifles had been hidden in Mauohi's litter. I thought I caught a glimpse of them when they were making over the frame in the little crater. I knew Tu-Hue wouldn't start any trouble until they had dug them up from wherever they had cached them, but I wasn't going to be taken unawares if I could help it."

"Is that all the rifles they had in the *pa?*" asked Hawkes.

"Probably, and we have those now. The Government has called in most of their firearms. I'm —— glad right now that I never traded them any."

"What time did Koroa reach you?"

"I had been on watch 'bout half an hour, I imagine, when I saw a light in the tunnel, reeling and staggering about. I switched on my torch as the girl called out: 'Paraki! Paraki!' and came into the ring of my light. She was in bad shape—done up and bleeding all over her arms and legs, which are badly cut up. I gave her some whisky, and she braced up enough to tell her story. That must have been a horrible thing for her, seeing Mauohi tossed out of the geyser. I tell you, Hawkes, blood counts. It took a white girl to get through.

"She kept her head, too, though she was nearly played out. Kept asking me to hurry, but remembered about ropes and that there was wood for the bridge at the other end of the tunnel. We fixed up a litter for her and came through the tube in a hurry. Saw your mark on the entrance by the pool and came out on the main crater about five o'clock.

"There was no going on till the fog cleared, so we went into the cave where the talking mud-springs are—cheerful place, that—and there we rested, made some soup and fixed the girl up as well as we could. She dropped off, but the rest of us kept awake. It's a chancy place, and your boys were popeyed all night.

"Quite as well nobody slept but Koroa, for just as the sun was working through the mist a rifle went off in the tunnel and a bullet zipped by me—*whang!*—into the side of the big mud-pool.

"It was brothers Tu-Hue and Putiri with

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the gang, of course. They had retrieved their guns and come back to put us quietly out of the way, get hold of the girl and wait further orders from Mauohi. Not finding us at the pool, they had hiked top-speed through the tunnel. I guess Tu-Hue knew the way all right without your mark, and they might have got away with us anyhow, if the fools had known how to shoot.

"As it was, it was a close call. Another shot came out of the tunnel. I slipped as I was getting up and I guess they thought they had us. Anyway, they rushed, and we let go. Dicky-Dick peppered one of them with the shotgun, and I got the short wizard in the belly and winged Mister Tu-Hue. He dropped his rifle with a whoop—Putiri had the other—and came at me with his knife, but these automats are mighty handy for in-fighting and I must have killed him three times over before he dropped.

"I got Putiri, too, through the forearm, only I'm afraid I didn't break it; and he dropped his rifle. Dicky-Dick let loose with his second barrel, and they scooted, dragging the short wizard with them. He's probably dead by this time, though. Putiri was frothing at the mouth; but they wouldn't listen to him, and I got the rifles. They had dropped their torches and they didn't wait to get them. Hope they had a picnic getting through the tunnel in the dark. We disposed of Tu-Hue——"

"What did you do with him?"

"There's a nice potful of boiling mud-soup in that cavern. Maybe you looked at it. You must have heard it. Dicky-Dick and me toted Mister Wizard up to the rim and with a 'one—two—three' we plumped him slump into the middle of a big bubble. He busted it nicely; the soup splashed up; and that was the end of Tu-Hue, Esquire. Ever read the Bab Ballads? Where the old sailor 'ups with his 'eels and buries 'is squeals in the scum of the boilin' broth?'

"That's what happened to Tu-Hue; only he didn't have any seasoning, like the chap in the poem. That's all there was to it. Koroa told us where to look for you, and we made double time getting there."

"YOU think they'll come directly after us, or wait for news from Mauohi?" asked Hawkes.

"That's a gamble. They know something's wrong, of course, by Koroa showing up. Putiri can travel; and he'll come after the girl, I think, as soon as he can get started, provided the little wizard I plugged in the belly doesn't linger for a day or so. If he dies, with Tu-Hue and Mauohi out of the way, I don't think they'll bother very much about the mask. Eh, Mr. Schussler?"

"I think not. It iss not used in the bresent religion or they would not haf hidden it away. It will pe forgotten, I think, in a short time."

"Besides," said Hawkes, "they are not sure we've got it. They don't know where it was. But Putiri knows we've got the girl. Is there any way they can beat us to the bottom of the gap, Black?"

"Think not. They'll go back to the *pa* first with the wizard and hold a pow-wow before Putiri will be able to start. They may warn the villages ahead of us by drum signals, but this is a hard part of the country for sounds to carry. Too much cut up. I imagine they'll go across country, guessing we'll tackle the gap; but they will have a hard time beating us out, with any kind of luck. It's going to be rough going through that gap; but if we get our start and I can get hold of a canoe we can go down stream as fast as the water runs. And that's some pace in these rivers."

"Where do you expect we'll strike the coast?"

"I figure near Cape Ihu, on Mangai Bay. The cape separates Mangai from the Bay of Islands."

"That should come within the range I set for Manners. Once we pick up the topsails of the *Ono* we're fairly safe; eh, Schussler?"

"*Ja.* There shall pe no more trouble, now that we haf de mask," answered the scientist. His mind, planning the absolute demolition of his scientific rivals, seemed absolutely abstracted from present conditions. He walked constantly beside his treasure as it swung from its burden-pole, watching it zealously and steadying it as it swung.

"Well," said Black, "the cabin of the schooner will look like home to me, but we're just getting into the woods, to my notion. You don't feel like leaving the girl behind, I suppose—— Hold hard now, Hawkes! I didn't mean it. By the way, how long is it since we started?"

"Left Auckland on the third—Saturday," said Hawkes. "Left Kerikeri Monday morning, and got to the *pa* Sunday after-

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noon, the eleventh. Left there Tuesday——"

"Which was the thirteenth. I might have known it," interrupted the trader. "And it was on a Friday you started through the tunnel. Coincidence, of course; but after this I'm going to eliminate Fridays and the thirteenth of the month as starting-out days."

"And today is Sunday. That ought to give us good luck in getting out of the mess."

"Lord! Sunday!" complained Black. "And all the shops closed in Auckland, and every one digesting their Sunday dinner. Next Sunday I'll be having Sunday dinner with the missis, I hope. She's a great cook, is the missis. Roast beef underdone, Yorkshire pudding browned, with the gravy on it, cauliflower, roast potatoes, apple tart——"

"Shut up," said Hawkes. "This is a fine place to talk about cauliflowers and apple tarts! Wait till we get clear of this devil's dumping-ground."

"Hell's backyard; that's what it is. Better say farewell to your friends the geysers. Here's where we turn off."

CHAPTER VIII

AN UPSET AND A DISCUSSION

COMPARED to the present journey through the gap, their previous experiences seemed to have been child's play. For three days after they entered the great breach in the crater-wall they clambered down through a wilderness of crumbling and broken lava, following the stony torrent of the once-fiery overflow held between walls of dark-gray basalt. Everywhere the weathered lava gave way beneath their feet, breaking into sharp edges that slashed through all protection.

Gas everywhere had blown the rock into ragged gaps and pits. High waves of flinty, vitrified mineral extended in barriers from cliff to cliff, over which they had to toil. Loose fragments gave way beneath them; deep rifts had to be leaped or spanned with a crude bridge improvised from the litter-poles.

Koroa, rapidly recovering from shock and fatigue, insisted on walking with the rest; but her feet were badly torn from her trip through crater and tunnel, and Hawkes kept her perforce in the litter, Schussler dressing her cuts with ointment from the medicine-case. The Raiateans' feet and legs were soon in bad shape, despite their renewal of clumsy sandals and leggings made from the matting. The shoes of the white men were travesties of worn-out soles, barely held on by rags and strips of leather.

The nights were cold, and there was no wood for fires, for they dared not sacrifice the litter-poles until they were clear of the crevasses. Each morning the fog from the crater rolled down between the cliffs, wrapping them in a chilly, moist embrace which possessed but one merit, that of cutting down the period of fierce heat, refracted from glaring rocks, to six daily hours of torture.

Night travel was impossible, the torches useless, in that labyrinth of piled and broken lava. There was no semblance of a trail, hardly anything that could be called the floor of the gorge. Worst of all, there was no water. Hawkes rationed out the scanty supply of canned tomatoes, the soothing pulp of which alone relieved their thirst and enabled them to swallow more solid food.

Eight scarecrows emerged from a final gully of basalt in the late afternoon of the third day. The flow had terminated in branches of diminishing rock, spread like the fingers of a giant hand. Between them, in the scanty soil of ashes and decomposed lava, grew rank grasses, scrubby bushes and coarse bracken—the commencement of the great fern-plains of the central plateau.

This was intersected by deep, sudden ravines, banked with pipe-clay. The first held no water. Descending the second in the last of the twilight they heard the welcome rush of a stream, and at last made camp, with the luxuries of a glowing fire and abundance of sweet water.

"Sleep late tomorrow?" suggested Black. "They've hardly reached the *pa* by this. We can afford to lay off tomorrow and rest. I haven't heard any drums. We sure need it."

So the next day passed in bathing of aching, bruised and wounded limbs, strained and sprained almost to dislocation; long hours of sleep in the sun, and a real meal. They celebrated the occasion with a special if impromptu menu. Dicky-Dick and his mates found crawfish in the stream and,

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making a dam, secured a number of buff-colored, spotted fish, full of oil and eminently satisfactory. Black got some doves, and Koroa, her feet well enough for her to hobble about, discovered some bushes of great golden raspberries. Schussler, in camp making up his notes, potted an inquisitive iguana which formed the *pièce de résistance* of the meal. All hands shared the last of the Scotch whisky, and the night discovered a strong-hearted, cheerful crowd about the fire, luxuriating on their beds of fern.

"Tomorrow we ought to find a *pa*," said Black. "Both the Aupouri and Rarawa tribes have villages between here and the coast. We'll cross the plateau this morning and get to streams where the ravines run east and west to the sea. Two days should find us at the coast, which we'll hit either at Takou or Mangai Bays, or the Bay of Islands. If we make Takou, there's Whangaroa to the north, where we can get a boat for Kerikeri; but probably we can work over to the south toward Mangai Bay. The great point is to tackle the first navigable stream we come across."

The listening Raiateans buzzed like swarming bees at the prospects of getting back to the *Ono*. Hawkes turned to Koroa. There had been little time for talk during the arduous climb from the crater, but he had noticed that the girl's demeanor toward him had changed. Sweet she was, cheerful and uncomplaining; but a little shy, more than a trifle proud, so that he had to make all advances.

And there were troubled lights in her dark eyes. Manlike, knowing his own intentions, he ignored the position of the girl, forgot her natural bewilderment at the situation in which she found herself, restored to her own race, but alone, without kindred, the future a blank, save for the man who she thought loved her, yet who forebore to speak.

They, she thought, were going back to their friends, their families. Black talked of his wife, of life in Auckland of which she had heard tales from visiting tribesmen. Hawkes and Schussler would sail away in the big canoe, and what was to become of her? She was too proud to ask, and too confident, after all, of Hari. He would tell her at the proper time, she decided. But the sensitive soul of her was hurt at his reticence.

THE next morning they crossed the last ravine. All stopped limping as they topped the rise and saw beneath them a little lake, tree-set, with moving specks on its surface that the glass revealed as canoes.

Hawkes called a council of war.

"Do you know the place?" he asked Black.

"That must be Lake Ataahua," said the trader. "The *pa* belongs to the Rarawa tribe, and they know me. Ataahua River rises there and reaches the sea at Mangai Bay. It's full of rapids and falls, but navigable by poling and portage. I can make a dicker with them for a canoe."

"You'd better go in alone, I think," said Hawkes. "We can make a détour and wait for you downstream a ways. Then if Putiri comes along they won't have any description of the party. Can you make explanations for getting a large enough canoe?"

"Better let me take your boys down with me. I'll tell them I have some goods traded for down the river and have visited them on a scouting-trip. I may have to take some mats, but we can dump them overboard if they're in the way. Don't worry if I'm gone some time. I'll have to go through the regulation how-d'ye-dos."

The party separated—Hawkes, Schussler and Koroa making a circuit about the lake to strike the river some distance from the *pa*, and Dicky-Dick and the Raiateans going with Black.

THE two men and the girl successfully avoided notice and reached the steep cliffs of the ravine of the Ataahua without trouble. Between the high banks, tree-crowned, set with great nodding ferns, the stream ran swift and narrow in deep channel and foaming rapids, with here and there a tumbling cascade. From the cliffs waterfalls fell at frequent intervals into the rapidly widening river.

At a shelving beach by a wide pool the three halted to await the coming of Black and the canoe. Hawkes and Schussler had carried the mask, never out of the latter's sight or reach, between them, and the scientist surveyed it anxiously as they set it on the beach.

"I like not that water," he said. "Should we upset in a deep blace we might lose de mask. If you will helb me, Hawkes, we

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should cut some of those pines and make for it a raft, in gase of trouble."

It was something to do, besides a good idea, and Hawkes' sailor hands soon constructed a practical raft to which they bound the mask in its wrapper of mats. Hawkes started to use his scanty linen for cords, but Koroa swiftly climbed the bank and returned with pliant vines which she wove deftly about the little raft and its burden, enclosing it in a network.

In mid-afternoon a light-draft canoe with Dicky-Dick and his boys at the blades, Black steering, paddled into the pool.

"It's all right," said Black. "They've heard nothing. We're to leave the canoe at the mouth of the river, where there's a division of the tribe, with a chief I know well. Stream's navigable, with care. We've got the start of them, I think, unless they know of some cut-off; and we stand a good chance to get clear."

The friendly villagers had provisioned the canoe with fresh meat, vegetables and tobacco. The rest of the afternoon they passed in deep, unvexed water, a voyage of quiet comfort, and camped at sunset on a sandy beach for an appetizing supper and a long, luxuriant night of sleep.

The next day the water grew more turbulent. Rapids were safely negotiated by poling and, in one stretch, by towing from the shallows of the shore, the Raiateans tugging with a will while Hawkes and Black kept the canoe in the current, and Schussler watched the mask on its raft to which he had attached a line constantly belted about his waist. Koroa lay at ease in the stern of the high-prowed craft of buoyant *totara*. Giant *kauri*-pines began to appear on the banks, the high foliage meeting overhead, and the way led through a green twilight.

AND then the malignant Fate that had marched with the expedition gave them a blow to remind them that they were not yet clear of trouble. The stream had narrowed, the water running swift and deep, when Hawkes heard the familiar sound of breaking water. Sweeping around a curve between high walls of rock they found themselves in the midst of fierce rapids, above the noise of which sounded the roar of a cataract. Rocks prevented them from poling to the shore, and they were suddenly on the green, glassy brink of a fall that dropped sheer to a foaming pool twenty feet below, its lower end tossing in a confusion of troubled currents.

The next instant they were striking out for the shore. All swam well and easily, unhurt in the upset, even to Schussler, his bald head bobbing in the pool like a bladder as the line attached to the raft jerked at every stroke. Koroa was first to reach the bank, emerging like a young naiad, the torn garment of scarlet calico that she wore beneath her mat blanket clinging to the graceful curves of her lithe form as she stood checkered in the sunshine.

All made light of the mishap. Schussler puffed to shore towing the raft, which through his foresight had proved the saving of the mask. The wetting was nothing, soon remedied by the sun. But the canoe had gone down the lower rapids, splintered against the rocks; and a search-party led by Dicky-Dick failed to find it. They retrieved a mat or two, but their provisions and utensils, the light-sticks, rifles and shotgun, field-glasses and camera, were irretrievably lost.

Still, there were fish in the stream and berries in the woods. They might make shift to stalk an iguana or even a dove or two with their automatics, which they had carried in belt holsters. The question of cooking was the vital one. Sun heat failed to restore the virtue of the matches, and Hawkes tried in vain to set fire to *totara*-twigs and dried cones by firing his pistol, in which the cartridges had remained unharmed in the handle chamber.

"Look, Hari!" said Koroa. "I will get fire for you."

"Good girl," said Black. "*Kauoti?*"

She nodded assent, then borrowed Dicky-Dick's case-knife, which he had carried on a lanyard, and cut splinters from a dry pine-branch. Scraping lint from a piece of Hawkes's shirt, now dry, she made a sling of a strip torn from her own dress, stuffing the lint into the hollow of the sling.

Searching amid the trees, she came back with a branch of hardwood in which she carved a groove. Holding this at a slant, she rapidly worked a stick of softer wood up and down the furrow. Soon dust fell to the bottom of the groove and sent up a tiny smoke. This she gathered swiftly and placed on the lint, then swung the sling about her head. The smoke became thicker, a spark appeared, and the smoldering lint burst into flame.

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"*Te pukuroa* (flame)!" she cried triumphantly, as the splinters caught and the fire crackled merrily about the twigs and cones. With the blaze well started, she superintended the building of an *umu* on the beach, lining the sandy pit with stones and heaping high the embers—Dicky-Dick acting as chief assistant, while the rest foraged for crawfish and eels and fern-roots. In an hour the steaming meal was ready; and after they had finished, relaxing happily, though lamenting the loss of pipes and tobacco, Koroa exclaimed, with more animation than she had shown of late!

"Now, Hari: Am I not a good *taku-ahi?*"

Scarcely had she said it when a blush suffused her face, neck and shoulders, glowing even in her arms, showing through the sunbrown like a sunset viewed through amber. With a low cry she covered her face with her hands and sped into the shelter of the tall ferns.

Hawkes looked at Black, perplexed.

"You see," explained the trader slowly, "*taku-ahi*, like many Maori words, has a double meaning. It stands for wife as well as fire-lighter."

Hawkes turned and swiftly followed up the gully. At the crest of the rise, where the slope flattened to a ferny plateau set about with trees, he saw the fern-plumes nodding as she passed between and beneath their head-high fronds. But when he reached the level there was no sign of life or movement save for a cluster of butterflies with great purple splotches on their silver wings, fluttering aimlessly above the breathless tufts of fern. Had the girl, like a true dryad, slipped into some sheltering trunk, she could not have more completely disappeared.

"Koroa!" cried Hawkes. "Fragrance! Koroa!"

Only a startled parrot, with a squawk that imitated the girl's name like an echo, broke the silence.

Hawkes beat the plateau in vain and, despairing of his search, passed to the bank of a high cliff above the rapids, where the Raiateans still sought for useful driftage. Presently he descended to them.

SCHUSSLER and Black looked at each other as Hawkes left them.

"So!" said the scientist. "It would seem that our sailor friend is in lofe?"

"Hawkes?" replied Black. "In love with Koroa? Not half so much as she is with him. She's crazy about him."

Koroa, doubling back among the ferns, heard the trader's coupling of the names and crouched like a hare in covert. Under Hawkes' tuition she had acquired a fair command of English, though she could understand it better than she could as yet master its strange consonants.

"*Ach!*" said Schussler. "It iss an idyll, my friend. *Ja*, an idyll. Youth for both, und strength, and the call of mate to mate. Und so—happiness!"

"I don't look at it that way," said the trader. "I've seen 'em after they've lived with the natives and come back to white man's living, and they never forget the habits of *pa*—not the best of them. There was that young chap with the Ngati-Potama tribe I told you of, who went into Parliament. He's Maori at heart. I guess what we call breeding and manners is a matter of early environment. They get veneered over maybe, but they've lived free too long. What you call atavism, Mr. Schussler."

"That is a much apused term, my friend. It does not always abbly. Preeding is preeding. You say blood will tell. It iss a good saying. There are what we biologists know as de bersistent cells that exist through de generations. Somedimes they are de germs of art, of music—of disease somedimes, but often of gentleness, of courage, of purity, of de desire for the pest things. It iss not veneer when de material underneath is good timber. De girl, I believe, has all these things. She iss a goot girl py nature. De abbetite for de pest is there. Wait until she sees."

Koroa, listening breathlessly, made little headway in the meaning of this conversation. Only she gathered that the one was for, the other against her in her love for Hawkes. And the trader's next words, in simpler language, confirmed the misgivings she had felt.

"That may be," said Black, "but what about while she learns? If he marries her, he'll be ashamed of her. She can't eat properly; she'll offend every minute after the first of it wears off. I've seen it, I tell you, and it don't work. He'll keep her in the background, and by the time she's picked up things he'll be tired of making excuses for her. She's just a savage, after all. Better let her go back to her people. She'll

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forget in a little while, when she has a couple of children to look after."

Koroa pressed a hand to her heart, to still the pain that stabbed it. Hari ashamed of her—a savage! Better go back to her people!

"Besides," went on Black, "this isn't a life-and-death matter with Hawkes. Of course he is grateful to the girl, as you are, for getting the mask. I suppose it means a good deal of money to both of you."

"*Ja*," assented the scientist. "Money, und—for me—much more."

"Well, can you imagine Hawkes, with money enough to do what he wants, getting lovesick over a girl he has known only two weeks? How do you know but what he's got a dozen girls waiting for him in a dozen ports? Do you know what they call him in the South Seas? 'Handsome Harry,' Dicky-Dick tells me; and he's an all-the-time winner with the women."

So much for Dicky-Dick's vainglorious boasting in praise of his beloved skipper. The knife seemed turning in Koroa's breast. "Girls waiting in a dozen ports!"

"He may be married, for all you know," said Black.

"I pelief not," said Schussler, "put you may be right in the other things."

"Let the girl go back," repeated the trader. "When we get to the coast you can give her a present, and that'll end it."

"Go back!" The words flamed through the numbness of Koroa's brain and made her resolve. If Hari loved her he would have spoken; but Paraki was right. He was a wise man. Hari had many women, perhaps a wife. What was she against these, and the mask they were so anxious over and which meant so much money? Go back she would, though not yet—not till they had reached the sea and Hari was safe from the pursuit which she knew must have been started by Putiri.

Softly and silently as she had come she stole to the head of the gully, and presently came back with news of plenty of doves to be had for the shooting.

BLACK got to his feet.

"Better not," said Hawkes, rejoining the party after his resultless chase, "I don't think we ought to risk a shot or waste one—just now."

"What's up?" said Black. "Seen anything?"

"I haven't, but Dicky-Dick has — or rather he has sensed it."

"Smell!" said Dicky-Dick, puffing his wide nostrils. "Can feel—here!" He tapped his chest and head. "Men in woods—no friends."

Black looked at him doubtfully.

"I'll trust his senses," said Hawkes. "I have before. He's got something we've lost. You know about that, Schussler?"

"*Ja*," answered the scientist. "It iss so. The Papuans, they haf it—alzo many of the South Sea Islanders. It iss instingt, that we haf bartered for other things."

"When did he get on to it?" asked Black. "How close does he think they are?"

"No can tell that," said the Raiatean. "I know they come for long time, all day. I think pretty close now."

"We'll set watches tonight," said Hawkes. "Two hours apiece. Think they've got firearms?"

"They may have borrowed some," said the trader. "Probably not. They wouldn't waste time to palaver."

"Well, we'll set Dicky-Dick on watch now," said Hawkes. "Who has the time?"

"Here!" said Schussler. "My wrist-watch iss waterbroof."

"Then you from twelve to two. I'll take ten to twelve—then Black, two till four. We should start as soon as possible after that. Once we make the coast we are practically safe, and the *Ono* is liable to show up at any time. Let me have your automatic, Black; mine must be near empty. You can take Schussler's when he's through watch."

He looked around for Koroa, but the girl had made a nest for herself among the ferns and seemed asleep. Some of the mats had come ashore, and she had taken one of them, dried by the fire, and wrapped it about her.

Nothing seemed stirring in the woods or on the river that night. Only Dicky-Dick, breathing deeply through his nose as he paced the upland plateau with his skipper, pointed into the depths of the *kauri*-pines.

"They stop close up now, *kapitan*," he said. "I think I watch all night."

"No," commanded Hawkes. "You turn in and be fresh for the morning."

LONG before dawn the little caravan started through the woods, dripping with dew and gray with the morning twilight. Sleepy, protesting parrots

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screamed overhead, and startled doves whirred through the forest aisles. The change in the character of the foliage, the dense grouping of the *kauri*-pines to the practical exclusion of other trees, all proclaimed the proximity of the sea; and the party swung on at a good pace, exhilarated by the hope of a speedy ending of their journey.

Their cheer was not shared by Koroa, who marched silently, avoiding all attempts of Hawkes to draw her into conversation. So, after a while, he left her to her moods for the pressing business of keeping the party at top speed. His resolve to tell her of his love had not lessened, and through the long day his thoughts ran on the future —on matters of education for Koroa, on the spending together of the prize-money from the mask, on tenderer, more intimate hopes.

But of all this Koroa—aflame with jealousy one moment, cold with despondency the next, strengthening her resolve to go back to the *pa*, to wed later, perhaps, Putiri, when the pain in her heart had dulled —sensed nothing.

After a brief halt at midday they pushed on with renewed zest. The air was balmy in the lower altitude, holding the balsam of resinous boughs and leaves, the sweet faint odor of the fern. Toward the end of the afternoon another scent was added to the forest bouquet—caught by Dicky-Dick and the Raiatean sailors long before the white men sensed the salty savor of the sea, borne on a breeze that blew strongly in the open places and had long baffled Dicky-Dick's attempts at gaging the pursuit.

CHAPTER IX

KOROA UNDERSTANDS

AT SUNSET they caught the first glimpse of the ocean, though the murmur of the Ura-Ura, as the Maoris name the sounding sea, had been in their ears for an hour. They came out on a headland about which the surf was beating and the gulls were wheeling and mewing. All hastened to the verge of the steep cliffs and gazed at the shining water, the sparkling, heaving breadth of it promising a final deliverance from all travail. Koroa stood apart by a *kauri*-pine, poised as if wishing to take flight across the bright expanse, her eyes wide as she watched the foaming breakers where they shattered on a ridge of jagged rocks that ran, saw-wise, out to a low islet topped with pines.

"No sign of the *Ono*," said Hawkes, "and no hope of getting away tonight. Have you any idea where we are, Black?"

"This is Cape Ihu," said the trader. "The bight is Mangai Bay. Kerikeri and the Bay of Islands are beyond that high point to the south—ten miles or more away, I reckon."

"We'll camp here tonight," said Hawkes, "and start a lookout for the *Ono* at dawn. She ought to show up some time tomorrow, if Manners is obeying orders. This should be the northern limit of his patrol. Make a fire, Dicky-Dick, and get some of the boys out on that reef to see if they can't find some fish.

"Well, Schussler," he continued, "one more night of it and we should be clear of it all. We'll set constant watches against surprise, and if the *Ono* doesn't show up by noon tomorrow we'll start out along the shore for Kerikeri."

Koroa, seated on the edge of the steep, was gazing seaward, her dark hair lifted by the breeze.

"Will you walk on the beach with me till supper's ready?" Hawkes asked her.

She looked at him for a moment, then arose and silently followed him to the shore. The tide was out, and a broad stretch of wet sand set with great weed-bearded boulders gleamed purple in the level light. Across the foaming waters the glory of the sunset lay in dazzling radiance. They walked barefooted in the edge of the creaming surf —the scene, with the great combers, the thunder of their roar and the power suggested by their constant motion, a wonderland to the girl. She was a little afraid of it all, and at another time would have sought comfort from Hari's voice or arm. But now she walked without speaking, as if with a stranger.

"Fragrance," said Hawkes, "what's the trouble?"

Turning, she looked at him gravely, but kept silence.

At the ledge of rocks Hawkes assisted the girl up the long ledges to where a great block of lava had been carved by the waves into a natural chair that looked across the water.

There they sat down together, and

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Hawkes took the girl's hand, which rested in his, unresponsive.

"What is the trouble, Fragrance?" he asked again.

"There is no trouble, Hari," she answered quietly, though the rise and fall of her bosom gave evidence of a gathering tumult within. "You are here, with the mask that is to make you rich. Tomorrow your ship will come and you will sail away in safety. All the trouble is past."

"That is true, dear," he said. "Happiness commences for us all tomorrow. But today we are still in the shadow. Why have you kept away from me?"

"I—kept away? No, Hari; ever since we left the mountain you have had but little time, it seems, to think of Koroa."

"That is not true, Fragrance. But there has not been much time for talk until we were clear. We had to get to the coast with the mask."

"Ah, yes! The mask!" she said bitterly.

"Yet I have tried to talk to you—to tell you something. Why did you hide from me yesterday in the ferns? I called you, but you would not answer."

"I wanted to be alone."

"Listen, Fragrance. You asked me if you were not a good *taku-ahi* before you ran away. I did not know then what the word meant, but I do now. I need a *taku-ahi*, not to make fires in the forest, but to light a flame on the hearth of my heart, beloved! It has long been cold and lonely."

"Ah, no, Hari; no. When I was at the *pa* I was *rangatira*. If I should go back I should be a chiefess still. But as a white girl I am ignorant; I know nothing of your ways. You would be ashamed of me and grow tired of Koroa—and I am too proud for that, Hari."

She looked at him like a young princess, for all her ragged scarlet gown and bandaged feet.

"That is but foolish talk," he answered, "if you love me. I have thought of that. You are clever, and the ways of white people—of your people—will soon be yours. I shall be rich now, with the money from the mask."

"Always the mask!" broke in the girl.

"And so," he went on, "I need not go to sea for a long time. And if you want to learn more quickly than I could teach you, there are places in Auckland or at Wellington where you could be taught, while I take the ship with Mr. Schussler back to Tahiti as I have agreed. I shall not be long, and my heart will be always with you."

"How many other girls have you said that to?" asked Koroa, her voice breaking its repression. "What do I know of you save that you are a man and I a girl, and that girls are fools to believe what men tell them? Who is waiting there for you at Tahiti, Handsome Hari, and on twenty other beaches?"

She sprang to her feet, the words coming in a torrent.

"Why, I do not even know but that you have a wife somewhere, far grander and more beautiful than I am——"

"Fragrance!" said Hawkes sternly, trying to take her hands.

But she stepped back against the rock, her arms and hands outspread, like a wild thing at bay.

"I am but a girl, yet I am a woman," she went on. "Many women have looked on you and loved you. Many are waiting for you. Why should you want to take me from my people? Soon I should be as the others who have loved you." The tears came to her eyes, but she fought them back.

"But you do love me, Koroa? Then why can't you trust me?"

"I don't know. Why should I?"

"You must," he answered. "Now that I know you love me, that is enough. Tomorrow you shall sail away with us in the ship, and when we come to Auckland we will be married."

"No!" she said. "No!" The words of Black, which had been growing like weeds in her mind all day, were choking her faith, stifling her love with persistent doubt. "You will go and I shall return to the *pa*, and soon all will be forgotten."

"To the *pa*? To Putiri?"

"Yes; to Putiri. Why not? At least I know he loves me. Has he not followed? Do you think it is your mask he wants? No; it is Koroa! Even now he is close by, searching for me."

"This is nonsense, Koroa." He attempted to take her in his arms, but she fled from him, leaping down the terraces and flying toward the camp.

Hawkes made no move to follow her.

"Poor little darling!" he thought. "No wonder she's overwrought, after all she's gone through. Some one has been talking,

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though, about that Handsome Harry foolishness—Dicky-Dick I suppose."

His face hardened as he thought of his gossiping retainer, and he walked back to the summit of the cliff resolved to talk again to Koroa after supper, more gently. That she loved him he knew by her own acknowledgment; and the measure of his own tenderness for her, a realization of the blank that life would be without her, was revealed to him in its full depth for the first time.

"She will come with us to Auckland, if I take her against her will," he determined. "I must find some woman there to be kind to her. Black should know of some one. Poor little maid! She'll learn to trust me."

But there was no opportunity to talk to Koroa again that night. The darkness fell rapidly as they concluded their meal, which the girl refused to share, nesting herself under her mats in a great clump of ferns.

AS HAWKES took his watch before midnight he saw the gleam of Koroa's crimson garment by the light of the fire, shining beneath the mats that rose and fell softly with her breath.

"Poor little sweetheart!" he thought, and spent his watch in projecting smoother pathways for their love.

At four o'clock Black awakened him.

"Dark yet," said the trader, "and cold." He threw fresh pine-boughs on the fire, which leaped up brightly.

Hawkes looked instinctively where his dreams had led him, to the clump that was Koroa's bedchamber.

The mats still lay in the fern-pocket, but they were inert and strangely flat to cover a form.

He strode hastily over, lifted the robes and found only the crushed leaves where the girl had lain.

"Gone!" he said aloud, and the thought of her threat to return to Putiri flashed across his mind.

"Who? Koroa?" asked the trader. "Humph! No signs of a struggle—no ferns broken!"

"She may have gone down to the beach," said Hawkes. "I'll look."

The sky lightened to day as he vainly searched and called, returning to the camp at last to find them all awake.

"She's gone, all right," said Black, who had been half-guiltily remembering his talk of the day before—discussing the matter with Schussler.

"Gone of her own accord, too," he announced. "By ——, she's gone back to Putiri! I thought she was pretty quiet lately. Turned back native."

"That's a —— lie, Black," said Hawkes quietly.

"Eh?"

"I don't think you mean it, when you come to think it over. If the girl has gone, she was taken by force."

"Then where's your proof?" asked the trader resentfully.

A low call came from Dicky-Dick, half way up the glen.

"Look!" he said, pointing to some ferns pulled from the loose, moist ground by their roots. "Putiri he find *wahine* asleep. Maybe he put mat over head. Then she try pretty soon to stop walk along. This time I think they wrap her up in plenty mat. They carry. Go along this a-way."

The white men, looking up from the broken ferns, saw nothing of the further signs discovered by the Raiateans. Dew gone from the topmost plumes or swept from the open soil and moss, one leaf caught in the serrations of another at an unnatural angle—nothing escaped the eyes of Dicky-Dick.

"This way they go," he said, pointing back into the forest. "Five men, I think."

"You see!" said Hawkes. "They have carried her off."

"Is the mask safe?" he asked the scientist.

"*Ja*," replied Schussler, unwrapping the precious bundle that had served him as a pillow overnight.

"Then it was the girl they were after," said Black, "unless——"

He stopped, warned by the set face of Hawkes.

"Baron Schussler," said the latter, "we have got the mask. The schooner should be sighted any hour now. You are welcome to proceed to Auckland with the mask. Black can go with you. I'll keep Dicky-Dick and another man. Manners can come back for me. If you consider this a breach of contract, I will forfeit my share in the sale of the mask. As for me, I am going to get Koroa!"

"Softly, my poy," said the scientist. "Listen. All this iss nod necessary. If it had not been for de girl, nod you, nor I,

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nor de mask would pe here today. She iss a goot girl, und I go with you. De mask? We can pury him undil we gome back!"

"I'm in on that, Hawkes," said Black. "Forget anything I said."

The three shook hands. They swallowed some food that the Raiateans had prepared, and held a hasty council.

"While you talk, I hide de mask," said Schussler, and clambered down to the beach.

"The best thing will be to let Dicky-Dick trail," said Hawkes. "If we can come on them quietly we can get through without a fight. We haven't too much ammunition."

"I see Dicky-Dick is fixed," said Black.

The Raiatean boatswain had trimmed a fork of hardwood washed up by the tide, burned it in the fire a little, and then scraped it clean. In the cleft he had bound, with strips of cloth and mat-fiber, an oval stone from the beach, making a formidable weapon. His fellows were busy following his example.

"Pick two men, Dicky-Dick," commanded Hawkes, "and let them watch here for the schooner. As soon as she is sighted one must go on the point of rocks to signal her and the other follow our trail to give us the news."

Dicky-Dick, much to their chagrin, appointed two men for the duty.

"De mask iss safely puried," said Schussler, coming from the cliff-trail. "In de pottom of a bool in a cave I haf hidden it, und there it shall be safe till our return."

The little party of six took up the pursuit eagerly, Dicky-Dick leading with every sense alert, racing along at top walking-speed.

"Pretty soon dew all go," he said. "Then we no can walk along so fast."

HAWKES' thoughts were self-accusatory. As he strode through the fern, striving not to fret over delays, he sensed to the full what must have been passing through Koroa's mind since they had left the crater.

He, manlike, had taken for granted that she knew he loved her and understood his brevity of greetings for what occasioned it—the carrying out of his contract with Schussler (which included in his share of its value the bright and immediate future of Koroa and himself), and the importance of reaching the coast without delay. Now he realized that he had been treating the girl as essentially white in training as well as birth, whereas every inborn instinct within her was at war with her upbringing.

The joy of knowing she belonged to the same race as her lover had been speedily quenched as she listened to the idle talk of the adventurers, of home and friends and strange customs that she feared would lie beyond her mastery. She had felt alone. Hawkes, who should have been her best friend, seemed to have almost forgotten her, save for a casual word, as he neared the end of his quest.

Then the talk of other women on South Sea beaches waiting for "Handsome Harry" aroused her jealousy. The constant environment of unbridled passions since her childhood had covered, though it had not destroyed, her innate refinement. As a white girl she might have understood her lover's attitude, would have surrendered to him absolutely, trusting in his love. As a Maori maid, she expected to be taken rather by force of arms, almost against her will.

And to these combatants of her spirit, pride acted as a taunting instigator. If Hawkes loved her, if she were desirable, and not a poor outcast from both white and Maori, homeless, friendless, why did he not tell her so, convince her, love her? Surely he could not love as she did. Perhaps the white man could not. Yet she was white, and at the accidental touch of this man's hand a spark, always glowing within her, leaped into a roaring flame of desire from which she shrank, ashamed.

Much of this Hawkes, aching to get to hand-grips with Putiri, understood in the light of his manhood, clenching his fists and setting firm his jaw as they swung along, Dicky-Dick bent double as he searched out the way.

A HUNDRED signs kept the Raiatean on the trail long after the telltale dew had dried. There were broken cobwebs, crushed grasses, dead leaves disturbed, *kauri*-cones rolled from their hollows. In the thickets were broken twigs, on bare ground evidence of footprints that told Dicky-Dick his first guess as to the size of the party was correct.

"Koroa, she walk now," he announced. "We very close along now."

They were crossing a horseshoe-shaped

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promontory about which the river curved strongly in deep current. Its tilted plane sloped gradually toward the stream as they walked. Two or three times they heard not far ahead the chattering of parrots, and hastened. The trail led at last to a comb descending to the water, and down this they hurried to a narrow beach, vacant of life save for footprints plainly visible in the fine sand.

"They had a canoe after all," said Hawkes, as Dicky-Dick pointed out the furrow made by the prow where it had rested in the sand. "It's going to be a hard chase now. Which way have they gone?"

The Raiatean, snuffing at the air, which was quiet, at the foot of the ravine, pointed still inland.

"That a-way they go along, I think," he said. "Can climb cliff and tell plenty better."

They hastened to the summit of the cliff, and Hawkes ordered the sailors into the trees to try to get a glimpse of the river and the canoe.

One of them shouted from the branches of a young *totara*, and Hawkes clambered up beside him, then mounted higher.

The sweep of the river lay in a gleaming curve, and midway to the view, paddling strongly against the current, showed the canoe. Four men plied the blades, and in the stern a man steered. Beside him a spot of red flashed as the girl stood up and sprang into the stream, swimming strongly to the shore. Swiftly the man who was steering followed the girl into the water, while the paddlers, reversing strokes without moving in their seats, swept the canoe with the current toward the swimmers. The man caught hold of Koroa, who struck fiercely at him, and clung to the side of the craft while the Maoris urged it shoreward to a shelving beach. There, still grasping the girl, the group clustered about the leader, suddenly breaking up as the paddlemen started to gather clusters of ferns and toss them into the canoe.

The man, evidently Putiri, released the girl, who made no further effort at escape, but got into the stern. The men took their places and the canoe shot into the stream —then, turning, came swiftly down the current.

"Hello!" said Hawkes, as Black climbed up to the bough beneath him. "What do you make of that?"

"Coming back as a peace party. That's what the ferns are for. Truce-signal. Better get down and meet them."

Puzzled at this sudden and fortunate change of tactics, the pursuers descended the comb to the cove, reaching the beach just as the canoe turned shoreward. Putiri, standing in the stern, waved great fronds of fern in both hands, and the paddlers, dropping their blades as the canoe glided to land, displayed green plumes above their heads.

"Stay where we are," cautioned Black, as the prow of the canoe touched the sand some little distance away. "Let them start it."

KOROA huddled motionless in the stern as Putiri and the paddlers stepped ashore. At the word of their chief they piled spears and clubs on the shore and followed him as he advanced toward the white men, still waving the ferns.

"No rifles," said Hawkes quietly.

"No, but 'ware knives," answered the trader.

Putiri stopped, lowered his green peace-plumes, and advanced his right arm.

"*Aroha*," he said.

"*Aroha, ariki*," replied Hawkes.

"Let us make a talk," said Putiri in Maori.

"Above," answered Hawkes, pointing to the cliff.

Putiri haughtily, without a word, motioned to his men to ascend, leaving their weapons behind them. Then he spoke to Koroa.

"Come," he said.

The girl, with averted glance and bowed head, followed the Maoris up the ascent, Putiri close behind. Hawkes prepared to follow.

"You want me to smash the canoe?" asked Dicky-Dick in Raiatean.

"No," said his skipper. "Go ahead with the boys."

Dicky-Dick obeyed reluctantly, and the white men closed the file of climbers.

Hawkes led the way to a space clear from the trees, close to the edge of the cliff. There he halted. Putiri motioned his followers to one side. Koroa stood alone until Schussler moved closer and spoke to her, receiving no answer.

Hawkes ordered Dicky-Dick and the sailors to one side and advanced alone, Black falling back toward Koroa and the scientist.

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"Guns!" said Putiri, pointing at Hawkes' belt.

Hawkes flushed, then took out his automatic and tossed it on the ground by the Raiateans, who flung down their primitive weapons. Black and Schussler followed his example and returned to Koroa.

"Good," said Putiri.

"Listen, O white man," he continued. "You two came seeking the Face of Itupaoa, with this man—" he indicated the trader—"whom we thought a friend. For the mask, I care not if you have it. Doubtless you fought for it against the gods. Mayhap Mauohi is dead. For that I care not. She was old. Tu-Hue Paraki killed, and Kalama and me he wounded in an open fight. The priests of the Nga-Puhis are destroyed, and for that I care not. I am a warrior, not a wizard, and the days of the wizard are passing. Keep you the mask. It has ever brought death with it.

"But, if I am a warrior, I also am first a man. This girl, Koroa, was mine, betrothed to me by Mauohi. Though she was false, being bewitched by your magic when you cured her, yet did I desire her. So I took her.

"Now she tells a strange tale that you have taught her, that she is of your blood. It may be so. Mauohi brought her to the *pa* long ago from the coast and kept her apart till she was ripe for marriage. Still would I have kept her.

"But she tells me that you are her lover and that she loves you." Koroa gave a little cry and covered her face with her hands. "I know the ways of the white man. A Maori *rangatira* does not desire what a white man has soiled. So I bring her back. I do not mate with a ——."

The Polynesian language is apt for vile epithet, and Putiri called the shrinking girl a name unthinkable in a politer tongue.

The next instant he was staggering back from a blow swung straight to the jaw with all the force of Hawkes' right arm.

The Maoris sprang forward, but hesitated as the Raiateans sprang to their own weapons and menaced them.

"Keep back!" shouted Hawkes to Black, who had snatched up an automatic and came racing up. "This is my affair."

"Look out for a knife!" warned the trader as Putiri and Hawkes grappled.

THE blow, that would have downed most men, seemed only to infuriate the Maori chief. His face, distorted with rage, made more hideous by the spirals of the tattooing, was that of a demon.

At a glance Hawkes seemed outmatched. The Maori outbulked him by thirty pounds, hardly topping him, but being deeper and broader of chest. Where Hawkes' muscles played smoothly in their long sheaves, great bunches swelled upon the upper arms and shoulders of Putiri.

He had tossed aside his mat and was bare, save for his loin-cloth. His wounded arm seemed to have healed rapidly, and had evidently not incapacitated him.

Hawkes knew what he was in for. There were no rules to this kind of fighting, and he was prepared to match any tactics Putiri might bring forward. Also he remembered the knife probably hidden in the waist-cloth.

As they came together he thrust his left elbow against Putiri's neck and delivered a sounding blow to the kidneys before he slipped his right arm about the chief and strove to trip him. The massive legs of the Maori stood as if planted while he tore at Hawkes' hold.

Blows seemed of little avail, though the white man realized he was no match for the heavy native in a clinch. Time and again Putiri easily wrenched his holds apart. Once let those brawny arms get an undergrip about the chest, and a fall for Hawkes was imminent. Then a quick knife-thrust would settle the issue.

The men panted as they swayed together and tore away. Putiri's skin was slippery with sweat, and smoked as he tugged and struck. Hawkes' shirt was in tatters that gave the advantage to the chief in holding.

Putiri fought with every ounce of force and weight constantly employed. Hawkes, with sudden rushes of energy, strove to force his opponent from where he seemed rooted to the ground, hoping to get a lock by which to overbalance him.

Suddenly, in a clinch, Putiri sank his teeth savagely in Hawkes' naked shoulder.

The white man, frantic at the pain, broke loose, the blood streaming from the wound. For the moment he turned berserk. Beyond Putiri he caught a glimpse of Koroa straining between Schussler and Hawkes.

"Hari!" she cried.

Strength seemed to surge through him.

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Putiri, his beard stained with Hawkes' blood, roared and rushed forward, head downward like a bull, his arms flailing like wind-tossed boughs. Hawkes set himself and drove his right home to where the arching ribs of the Maori parted below his massive chest. Putiri's head seemed to jerk back; his arms fell by his side, and his eyes gazed into Hawkes' with something of terror. Then his legs failed him and he sank toward the ground. Hawkes brought up his left knee stiffly and it struck the jaw of the tottering chief with frightful impact.

Putiri dropped to his knees, clutching at the turf, his face twisted and gray in agony. Then he toppled over backward.

Hawkes stepped forward, when a warning shout came from behind him. The earth of the overhanging cliff where they had fought and trampled split softly under his feet and slid in a dustless avalanche toward the river; Putiri, still senseless, borne upon it as if upon a wave-crest.

He heard another shout as he tried to hold his balance on the shifting ground. He twisted swiftly, flinging himself on his face and clutching at some fern-roots, which gave way, and then at a clump of shrub to which he clung, even as he felt it tearing from the soil under the strain of his weight. Desperately he clutched for another handhold.

"Hari! Hari!" sounded a voice above him.

Looking up he saw the face of Koroa, her hair a-tumble all about it. Flat on the ground, she stretched down her round, slim arm to her lover. Beyond he could see Black kneeling beside her.

"Hold on a second, Hawkes!" the trader cried.

The bush shifted, and almost blindly Hawkes grasped the wrist of Koroa, kicking for some foothold in the damp earth.

He could see the dainty muscles tighten in the girl's arm, the tightening of her lips as she set them against the pain.

"It's all right, Hari," she said pantingly.

Dicky-Dick's loin-cloth flickered down by Hawkes' right hand, but caught, tangled in the little bush.

"Can you hold me just a second, dear?" asked Hawkes. "Black, lend a hand."

The strong hands of Black, prone beside the girl, grasped her forearm just below the elbow. Hawkes let go the bush and, swinging at Koroa's wrist, caught at the loin-cloth, moored by the sturdy Raiatean himself. Another second and he grasped hands with Black, and, scrambling, was pulled to safety.

"What about the natives?" he asked.

"Gone down to pick up Putiri—what's left of him. They're through. They know we have guns."

The trader looked quizzically at Koroa, who was binding up the torn shoulder of her lover, murmuring little words of pity.

"Your man just came in," he said to Hawkes. "Schooner's sighted. Personally I think ——"

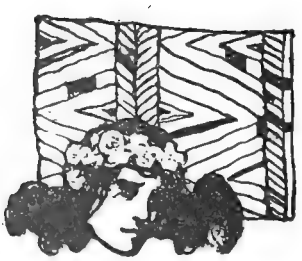
He stopped. Hawkes had arisen and taken Koroa into his arms. Motioning to Dicky-Dick to follow, the trader joined Schussler.

"I think," said the scientist, "that you and I had petter go und dig up de mask."

"HARI! Hari!" said Koroa, radiant in her lover's arms. "I did not tell him—what he said."

"Hush, Fragrance. Never mind that, dear. It's all over now. You know I love you?"

"Yes, Hari," she answered, holding back a precious second from his lips. "I knew that if you loved me you would come for me."



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Come-on Charley Deals in Art

By Thomas Addison

MR. PERCIVAL TEETERS, known also to fame as Merciful Skeeters, Come-On Charley's private secretary, was in the billiard-room of the Hotel Rirebien doing a little practising at French caroms. It was not long after breakfast and he had the room practically to himself. Mr. Teeters was something of a wizard with the cue, and more than once had conjured dollars with it from others' pockets into his own. To do this he had to keep his hand in, hence the early morning drill. As he now made a neat round-the-table shot some one spoke—some one who had come in quietly from the bar and approached the table.

"By Jove, clever!"

The speaker pronounced it "clevah," and Mr. Teeters looked at him. He was a young man, possibly thirty-two or three. He was exceedingly well put together, and carried himself with an air of quiet assurance that betokened one who knew his way about; and he was arrayed in a fashion that commended itself to the secretary's fancy.

"Not so slow," Mr. Teeters acknowledged graciously. "Like to shoot a few?"

The other laughed.

"Oh, dear, no! I'm not in your class, really. But I know good billiards when I see 'em. That shot now—the way you've left 'em—how about it? Cannon on the red. What?"

"Cannon?" echoed Mr. Teeters, puzzled.

Again the young man laughed.

"Oh, yes, to be sure. I believe you call it carom over here. On the red—what?"

Mr. Teeters shook his head indulgently.

"White," he said. "Dollar I score."

The young man smiled and laid a paper dollar on the rail. Mr. Teeters covered it with two halves and then, in the act of drawing back his cue, he paused in open wonder.

With a dexterous twist of the wrist the stranger had flipped a monocle on its silken ribbon into the grasp of finger and thumb and screwed it in his eye. Through this glistening lens he was attentively surveying the lay of the balls and waiting for Mr. Teeters to make his stroke. The proceeding was novel to that gentleman's experience, and it fascinated him. He hesitated a fatal second longer—and missed! And it was a perfectly simple shot!

"What do you know about that?" he cried. "A one-armed baby could make it lying on his back."

He threw down his cue in disgust, and stared again at the stranger. The latter, with a scarcely perceptible lifting of his brow, had released the glass and it was now dangling on his waistcoat. Mr. Teeters, to repeat, had never before seen anything like this. It impressed and it subdued him; there was something so prodigiously

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swell about it.

"I'm afraid I put you out," apologized the strange young man. "You could make it, of course," He gathered up the stakes and added: "Pray let me offer you atonement. I'm a bit seedy this morning—out last night and all that sort of thing—and a peg of Scotch would set me up, I fancy. How about yourself?"

He had a way of speaking that was winning, and Mr. Teeters warmed to him despite his loss. Here, he felt, was a personage worth cultivating; his clothes alone were a passport to any one's esteem. He accepted the invitation with the elegant nonchalance the occasion seemed to warrant.

"Thanks. Can't go the heavy wet this time of day, but I don't mind lapping up a dish of suds."

"Righto!" cheerfully acquiesced the other, and held out his hand. "My name is Harry Lynham." He smiled whimsically. "Viscount Lynham they call me at home. My father is the Earl of Eversole."

Mr. Teeters took the extended hand and breathed hard. He had heard of English lords, but had never expected to behold a real live one.

"My name," he mumbled, "is Teeters—Percival Teeters."

"Teeters?" questioned Lord Harry Lynham eagerly. "Not by any happy chance the friend and companion of Mr. Charles Arthur Carter? Eh?"

"I'm it," confessed Mr. Teeters, flattered to find himself in such renown.

"My dear fellow! I say, I'm charmed, you know!" exclaimed his lordship. "I've read a lot about you and Mr. Carter. That Brahma's Eye affair. What? Most extraordinary."

This word the Englishman pronounced "extrornery," and Mr. Teeters made a mental note of it. To be a swell, one must talk as well as look the part.

"Slick little job," he admitted. "A con man has got to step up to keep ahead of me and Charley. Got to foot it pretty swift."

"He jolly well has to, I should say," laughed the Viscount, leading off to the bar. "You can tell a ruby from a hen's egg. What?"

"Watch me," Mr. Teeters adjured him. "They can slip one over on me just as easy as pulling teeth from a whale."

"Just about," chuckled Lord Lynham. "Sleep with one eye open, eh?" He selected a quiet corner and sat down, motioning Mr. Teeters to do likewise. "This," he observed, "is what I call a right bit of luck, old chap—really. I've wanted to know you and Mr. Carter. Interesting people are deuced scarce these days."

Mr. Teeters expanded his narrow chest and wiggled his mustache under stress of the pleasurable emotions which assailed him.

"Say," he begged, "wait a minute and I'll get Charley. He's just as interesting as I am."

He scuttled out of the room, swollen with importance. Viscount Lynham watched him go in the mirror opposite his seat, and then lighted a cigarette and blew rings at his own reflection in the glass.

WHEN Mr. Teeters returned with his chief a man was standing at the table talking to Lord Lynham. His attitude was deferential, almost obsequious. Lord Lynham looked plainy bored. Charley checked Mr. Teeters, and they hung back near the door. The conversation reached them nevertheless, and they listened with ears a-prick.

"Fifty thousand dollars, my lord," the man was saying, "would give you a handsome profit on that painting."

"But I don't care to sell," Lord Lynham answered patiently.

"Would your lordship consider sixty thousand?" asked the man.

"No!"

Mr. Teeters nudged Charley.

"Get that?" he whispered. "Big potato!"

"I happen to know, if you will pardon me, my lord, that you paid only thirty-seven thousand," persisted the man.

The Viscount made an impatient movement, and his tone was mocking when he replied.

"Really? I fancied that was a secret and, d'ye know, I rather think it is in spite of your assurance. No doubt you have private information of the price I paid for the Meissonnier, and the Rembrandt, and the others. Eh?"

"My lord," rejoined the other mildly, "I am concerned only with this Corot at present. Judge Hewlett has commissioned me to offer you——"

"Oh, confound your Judge Hewlett!" broke in Lynham fretfully. "I tell you, my

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good fellow——" He stopped short, for he had caught a glimpse, it seemed, of Mr. Teeters and Charley.

"Come right over, gentlemen," he called out, and arose to welcome them.

"I say," said Charley, when his secretary had introduced him. "Don't want to butt in. Business first. Pleasure afterwards."

"Pray sit down," Lord Lynham entreated him. "It is not business, this affair—it's a bally bore. You've come in the nick of time, my dear chap." He turned to the man, who was tenaciously, though respectfully, holding his ground. "Mr.—— ah——"

"Hopkins," supplied that person.

Lord Lynham placed his glass in his eye and inspected Mr. Hopkins much as he might have some strange creature in the Zoo. A little shudder of admiration swept over Mr. Teeters as he witnessed it.

"My good Mr. Hopkins," said his lordship with quiet irony, "you and your sixty thousand dollars may go to the devil for all of me. This is final, you understand—quite so. Now if you will do me the favor of leaving me to the enjoyment of my friends I will endeavor to cherish no hard feelings for you."

"In that case, my lord," returned Mr. Hopkins, suave as ever, "there is nothing left for me to do but go."

And he went.

Mr. Teeters gazed with frank homage at his new-found friend.

"Merry Moses!" he ejaculated. "If I could hand out the frozen mitt like that I'd run for president of the Ice Trust. Hey, Come-On?"

"Smooth," said Charley absently. He was intently watching Lord Lynham. When that titled gentleman winked the monocle out of his eye Charley exhaled a long and pleasurable breath.

"That bounder Hopkins gets on my nerves," complained the Viscount, half humorously. "Do either of you, by the way, happen to go in for oils?"

"What kind?" asked Mr. Teeters. "There's hair-oil, olive-oil and Standard Oil."

He was quite in earnest, and Lord Lynham answered him with equal gravity.

"We're talking at odds, old chap. I mean oil-paintings, like that hanging over the bar there."

"Ha! That nood stuff?" Mr. Teeters cackled playfully. "Oh, I guess yes; we go in for oils all right."

"Sure," grinned Charley. "Know a lot about art. Much as knitting baby-socks."

"Ah yes, to be sure," said Lynham, nodding appreciation of the joke. "Other interests, of course. Well, for myself, I run a bit to art—something of a sharp at it, they tell me—and I've managed to pick up several rare pictures over here at a bargain. This fellow Hopkins seems to have learned about it, and he's been hounding me to sell 'em. He's an agent, as I understand it, for some of your multimillionaires. If I had listened to him I suppose I could have cleaned up eighty thousand dollars on the lot."

"Why not?" commented Charley. "It's a roll." Lacking a few hundreds, eighty thousand dollars was, in fact, the exact size of Mr. Carter's own especial roll.

"Oh, it's quite a handful, yes," acknowledged his lordship easily. "But these pictures were for my governor, you know. I shipped them home yesterday to Eversole Castle." He smote his knee in ludicrous dismay. "Dash it all, why didn't I tell Hopkins that and shut his wind off for good? I'm a bally ass! What?" He laughed wryly at his stupid oversight, and changed the subject to the more convivial one of Scotch.

And thus, in the most natural way in the world, began Mr. Carter's acquaintance with a delightfully democratic nobleman.

II

MR. TEETERS placed his hand over the telephone transmitter and looked mysterious. Mr. Carter, peeping out into the sitting-room from his bedroom door, was torn between native modesty and the desire for information; for he was in his birthday suit, having stepped trickling from his bath at the secretary's hail. Mr. Carter's bathing-hour, it should be explained, was noon—immediately at the conclusion of the daily bout with his boxing-master, the celebrated Joseph Link, late middleweight champion of the known world.

"It's a lady, Come-On," proclaimed Mr. Teeters. "If she looks like her voice she's got wings."

Charley's eyes kindled.

"Say! By George!" he whispered with unnecessary caution. "Hold her, Skeeters——"

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"I wish I could!" interjected Mr. Teeters fervidly.

"Be there in a jiffy," finished Mr. Carter. "Get her name."

He disappeared, and Mr. Teeters addressed himself to the fair one at the other end of the wire. When Mr. Carter, attired in slippers and bathrobe, came sprinting through the door not thirty seconds later—which certainly was well within a jiffy—Mr. Teeters was arising from the telephone. There was an air of repressed excitement about him.

"It's all over," he announced.

"Did they cut you off?" Charley's disappointment was manifest.

Mr. Teeters wagged his head from side to side in scornful dissent.

"Cut nothing off! It's all signed, sealed and settled."

Mr. Carter stared at his secretary.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"Mean?" retorted Mr. Teeters. "Why you and me are going round to Tortoni's tea-rooms on the Avenue and ask for Miss Vera Kingsley. She wants to talk about a picture to us—an 'oil.' Ha, ha!" Mr. Teeters simulated mirth with the engaging expression of a man with the toothache. "She must have seen us with Harry Lynham."

"Miss Vera Kingsley?" questioned Charley, nonplussed. "Who is she?"

"The girl on the 'phone," returned Mr. Teeters. "I asked her name, and that's what she handed me. Said she'd look for us at one o'clock—and rang off with me sitting there like a clam frozen in the mud. Extrornery! What?"

"Gee!" said Charley. "And it's half-past twelve!"

He leaped back into his bedroom. Mr. Teeters heard him pulling out drawers and slamming them shut, and giving other indications of a hurried toilet. He thereupon resumed, a little hurriedly himself, a certain undertaking in which he was secretly engaged when the telephone interrupted.

Going over to the mirror between the windows, Mr. Teeters drew from its concealment beneath his vest a single-barreled eyeglass which hung about his neck by a cord. This glass, with a series of horrible grimaces, he attempted to fit to his right eye; but the trick somehow escaped him.

Try as he would, over and over again, the monocle refused to stick, and the reluctant conclusion was forced upon him that a fellow must be born to that sort of thing, as to a harelip or a wart on the nose. With a petulant exclamation he snapped the cord and hurled the glass out of the window just as Charley dashed in, ready for the street.

"Got to leg it, Skeet," he cried. "Throw in your clutch."

Mr. Teeters, a cherished dream brought to naught, answered morosely as they stepped it off for the elevator—

"I got a creepy feeling, Come-On; like something's going to happen."

"Sure," said Charley. "Girl. Lots can happen."

THE hour was not a fashionable one at Tortoni's, and Mr. Carter and his secretary found the place a desert of empty tables. But a demure little maid in a bewitching apron conducted them to a small room off to one side where sat the lady at whose unconventional behest they were come.

She regarded them steadily from a pair of blue-gray eyes. They were like lucent beryl, and Charley thrilled as he looked into them.

"This is kind of you," she said simply, and with a grave smile.

"Glad I'm here," responded Charley earnestly; and Mr. Teeters mumbled something intended to express his own delight at finding himself present.

He had, in fact, passed instantly under the spell of the girl's beauty. She was tall and splendidly rounded. Her features were like chiseled marble, and her hair might have been spun from the red gold of Ophir. Add to this the manner of a princess holding court, and you had all the concomitants of an acute attack of heart-trouble for any man less than monk and more than monkey.

"You are not strangers to me by sight," Miss Kingsley informed them when they were seated. "You have been pointed out to me on several occasions, the last time when you were in company with Lord Lynham. But may I not pour you some tea, Mr. Carter—and you, Mr. Teeters?"

There was a tiny samovar before her, and the fashionable tools appertaining to it.

"Thanks," said Charley. "Good drink, tea."

"I was weaned on it," stated Mr. Teeters, coming out of his trance in a burst of lightsome humor.

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Miss Kingsley rewarded him with a low laugh, like the tinkle of silver bells, and busied herself with the cups and saucers.

"It is because you are friends of Lord Lynham," she explained, "that I ventured to request this interview. It is unusual, but—" she let her wonderful eyes rest briefly on each in turn—"necessity knows no law, they say, and I'm sure you will forgive me when I have put my case."

"Sure thing," said Charley with a warmth of emphasis.

Mr. Teeters nodded a vigorous assent to this.

"I'd forgive you murder," he asserted.

Miss Kingsley laughed again.

"If you would go to that extreme I have nothing to fear. I simply want you to help me sell a picture to Viscount Lynham."

"Oh, that's it!" said Charley, and looked at Mr. Teeters.

"Is it—is it asking too much?" questioned the girl. The laughter died in her eyes, and the shadow of anxiety clouded them.

"What about it, Come-On?" demanded Mr. Teeters. "Can we do it? Harry says he's played his string in this picture game. Shot his wad—broke," he interpreted for Miss Kingsley's benefit.

"Oh, no!" she exclaimed incredulously. "Why, his father, as everybody knows, is the richest peer in England!"

"Guess he's picture broke," ventured Charley. "Gone his limit."

"But this is a Titian!" cried Vera Kingsley, as if this statement of itself must sweep aside all objections.

"Ha! A Tishern!" echoed Mr. Teeters, frowning wisely.

"Yes. It is my mother's. Her father brought it to this country with him. It is a marvelous example of the master's art! Lord Lynham would surely buy it if he could be induced to see it. But he won't listen to me. I have written to him twice, and he hasn't answered. He thinks, no doubt, that it's a copy—a spurious work—and won't waste his time on it."

"Too bad," sympathized Charley.

"We need the money—mother and I—desperately!" faltered the girl. "I—I thought that perhaps if I told you just how it was you might arrange for me to see Lord Lynham, if—if you would be so good?"

She bent toward Charley with a little supplicating gesture that made a lump rise in his throat. He gulped it down, and jumped up from his chair with an energy that overturned it.

"That's the trick!" he declared. "Percy, get a cab. Come on, Miss Kingsley! Hotel Spenditt. Tackle Harry. Make him take a look."

Miss Kingsley veiled her eyes. There was a light in them she would not have him see. But she thanked him, and with a catch in her voice that made Charley gulp again. All womankind appealed to him, but a beauty in distress completely bowled him over.

LORD LYNHAM fortunately was in, and came down to them in the drawing-room of the Spenditt. He greeted Charley and Mr. Teeters with his usual good fellowship, but when Miss Kingsley was presented his manner grew distinctly formal. Her beauty did not appear to impress him in the least.

"Oh, yes," he remarked in a casual way. "I believe—eh?—that I've had the honor of receiving several notes from you, Miss Kingsley."

"To which," returned the girl spiritedly, "I have not had the honor of a reply, Lord Lynham."

His lordship shrugged, and twirled his monocle carelessly on his finger.

"I regret to say that I was not interested," he rejoined.

"But, Harry," interposed Mr. Teeters, "she's got a—a—— What did you say it was?" he asked Miss Kingsley.

"Tish something," prompted Charley.

Lynham lost his hold on his glass, and seemed to have difficulty in finding it.

"It is a Titian, Lord Lynham," said the young woman, directing her words to that nobleman in what one might have fancied was almost a tone of rebuke. "It has been in our family over fifty years."

"Eh? What? Oh, to be sure! You mentioned that in your communications to me," said the Viscount. "But come now; a real Titian? Oh, I say! All the Titians on this side are accounted for. Outside the galleries there are but two."

"Ours," the young woman answered him steadily, "is the third. There are not a dozen persons who know of it." She hesitated, then added, "We—my mother and myself—have lived in retirement since my father's death; and—we are poor, Lord Lynham!"

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She turned away, and Charley spoke up quickly:

"There you are, Harry. Trouble. Got to sell. Lots of people in the same boat."

"Millions!" put in Mr. Teeters. "And you can't sail your skiff without a bag or two of ballast. Let's have a squint at this Tishern, Harry."

The Englishman hesitated still.

"What does she want for it?" he asked. "She hasn't named the price."

"When you have seen it, my lord, will be time enough for that," the girl made answer over her shoulder.

"Ha! Depends on the size," observed Mr. Teeters. "A big house costs more than a little one."

"Oh, well, I suppose I'd better go—it's the easiest way," conceded his lordship with a resigned air. "But I'll lay you two to one in tens, Charley, that we flush a mare's nest."

"Sir!" exclaimed Miss Kingsley. She had wheeled swiftly, and was haughtily regarding the nobleman.

"Eh? Oh, I beg pardon! Undoubtedly you believe in the picture," he told her, and he bowed his apology further.

It was like a scene from a well acted play—the beautiful heroine spurning the polished villain. Charley looked at both of them; it was a quick glance from one to the other out of inscrutable hazel eyes. Then he said quietly:

"I take that bet, Harry. Going to get a surprise. Come on down. I sent for a car."

He led the way, and there was the ghost of a grin hovering on his lips as he punched the elevator call-bell. When they were seated in the big touring-car and rolling away from the Spenditt Charley spoke again.

"Say, Harry," he remarked. "Bet you buy the picture. Hundred even."

"Done!" laughed Lynham. "And you might as well pay up now, old top. Haven't I told you that I'm stone broke?"

Miss Vera Kingsley maintained a cold reserve, and yet, could one have seen, there was a satisfied look in her green-blue eyes.

III

THE house was in the neighborhood of Stuyvesant Square. It was a relic of a forgotten residential era, and had fallen into such a sorry state of decayed gentility that if it could it would, no doubt, have been ashamed of itself. "Rooms to Rent" seemed to be a chronic ailment with it, for a rusty tin sign with the dreary words was permanently attached to the bricks near the door.

Miss Kingsley made no apology for this dismal establishment as they drove up to it. She conducted the party into the front parlor and introduced them to her mother.

"We are reduced," succinctly stated this good lady. "Ruined by a bank failure." Thereupon she lapsed into a stony silence.

"This is the picture," said Miss Kingsley, coming at once to the matter in hand.

She indicated a canvas hanging in a corner near the door. It was the portrait of a woman. She was seated in a Venetian balcony which permitted a glimpse of a sheet of water with several misty buildings in the distance. It was assuredly very old, if a general murkiness of tone counted for anything. The light on the painting was execrable, but Lord Lynham made no comment. He went over and stood before it, his glass in his eye. Charley and Mr. Teeters ranged themselves behind him. Miss Kingsley remained aloof. She was watching them. Once she withdrew her eyes and glanced at her mother, nodding to her ever so slightly.

"Dandy frame, Come-On," remarked Mr. Teeters.

"Bully," agreed Mr. Carter.

"The frame, of course, is recent," observed Miss Kingsley; and she said it gravely.

Lord Lynham faced about. He seemed to be stirred from his usual self-command.

"Eh, I say, boys! Come over here by the window, will you?" he requested. And when they had followed him he said, lowering his voice to a whisper: "My word, but I believe the girl is right! I'm rather well up in these things, and it's a Titian or I don't know A from Izzard. Most extraordinary thing I've ever met with—a Titian hanging here in this beastly hole!"

Mr. Teeters gave tongue to the triumph that possessed him.

"Ha! I knew she wasn't pulling any guess stuff on us!"

Charley's hand was in his pocket. He jingled the loose change there—almost suggestively, it might have been imagined—and inquired, "Going to buy it, Harry?"

Viscount Lynham looked worried.

"If I can manage it. I've sunk a good bit,

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you know, in pictures lately. I'll find out what her figure is."

He crossed over to Miss Kingsley, who was now standing by her mother's chair.

"I tender my apologies," he said to her quietly. "It is a Titian, if I am any judge. The question resolves itself simply to one of price. If it is within reason——"

"One hundred and fifty thousand dollars is the price, my lord." Miss Kingsley named the amount with careful distinctness.

"Cash!" supplemented her mother with equal clearness, and lapsed again to stone.

"Gollamighty!" squeaked Mr. Teeters. "It ain't much bigger than a door-mat!"

"Drop it, Teet!" chided Mr. Carter, who was intent upon the proceedings.

"You know, my dear fellow," explained Lord Lynham tolerantly to the secretary, "they don't sell old masters by the square foot. And this is a Titian, the greatest of them all! Now that Miss Kingsley has set the price, I don't mind saying it's not beyond the mark. Suppose—" he addressed the young woman—"you give me an option on the picture until this time tomorrow. What?"

"For a thousand dollars, my lord," replied Miss Kingsley with a chilly smile.

"Cash!" came from the elder lady like a pistol shot. "I don't trust banks."

"Eh? Oh, by all means, if you insist," returned Lord Lynham, casting an amused glance at Charley.

He drew from an inner pocket a bill-book, and counted out from it ten notes of one hundred dollars each. These he handed over to Mrs. Kingsley.

"I think you will find the amount correct," he said. "Mr. Carter, Mr. Teeters, be so good as to witness that I have secured an option on this Titian until tomorrow at —er—" he consulted his watch—"half past two o'clock."

Hardly had he pronounced the words when a knock was given at the door. Miss Kingsley opened to it, and Mr. Hopkins entered. With him was an elderly gentleman of a scholarly appearance, gray-haired and gray-bearded. Lord Lynham raised his monocle and stared at him.

"By Jove—Hendricks!" he cried, and he went up to this person and grasped his hand. "The one man of all others I would wish to see! The Titian, of course! But how did you wind it?"

"My lord," put in Mr. Hopkins, turning from Miss Kingsley, with whom he had interchanged a rapid word, "this lady wrote to me some days ago, but the letter miscarried and reached me only this morning. I went to Mr. Hendricks with it. His interest was immediately aroused, and he has come with me to pass on the picture."

"You will recall, my Lord Lynham, that I failed to draw an answer from you," the girl reminded him with mockery in her tone.

"Gad! I was a bally ass!" confessed his lordship. "Charley, Percy, come over here! Mrs. Kingsley, let me present to you Mr. George Hendricks, Director of the Manhattan Art Museum. And, Hendricks, these are my two best friends in America—Mr. Charles Arthur Carter and Mr. Percival Teeters. You've heard of them—that ruby business—Brahma's Eye? Eh?"

"All New York has heard of that," declared the Director. "Exceedingly clever work, young gentlemen."

"Oh, nothing to brag about," stated Mr. Teeters blandly. "These con men can't get our mush. I can spot 'em every time."

"Got a little bird that whispers in his ear," said Charley, grinning.

He winked at Miss Kingsley. Mr. Hendricks laughed, then grew serious.

"But where's the Titian?" he demanded. "Ah!"

He bustled over to Mr. Hopkins, who was standing before the painting with a rapt look on his face. Lord Lynham drew Charley and Mr. Teeters to the spot.

"Mr. Hendricks," said the picture-agent, visibly agitated, "don't tell me I'm mistaken! I'd be willing to swear it's genuine."

THE Director of the Manhattan Art Museum lifted with deliberation from their case a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles and hung them over his ears. The bad light on the canvas seemed to trouble him as little as it had Lord Lynham. He took a step forward, shaded his eyes with his hands, and then stood stock still. Suddenly he cried out in ecstasy—

"Why, good heavens, Lynham, this is the lost Titian we've been trying to locate for years—'The Lady of the Loggia'!"

His excitement infected Mr. Teeters, who wiggled his mustache and goggled at the masterpiece.

"Merry Moses!" he piped. "Hear that?"

"Gee!" said Mr. Carter.

"Hendricks! It's Titian's—you are sure?"

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Lord Lynham shot the question at the expert.

"Sure?" shouted that personage in derision. "Am I sure of my own name? No brush but Titian's could have painted this. Such coloring! Such harmony of tone! Such certainty of touch! Such richness of —er—ah—idealism!" He sprang close up to the picture and peered in the corners. "Ah! Here's his 'fecit'—his mark!"

With this he spun around on his heel, and leaped across the space intervening between himself and the ladies.

"I request an option on this painting till I can consult my board," he panted.

Mr. Hopkins' manners dropped from him as if they had been tied on with rotten thread. He leaped after the Director, pushed him aside and thrust an enormous roll of bills at Mrs. Kingsley.

"Money talks!" he clamored. "Ten thousand dollars for the option till Saturday—three days!"

"Mrs. Kingsley," pleaded the Director, "civic pride should dictate a preference for the Art Museum. And I can safely promise you two hundred and fifty thousand dollars for this Titian!"

"Bah!" barked Mr. Hopkins. "Senator Park—you know him; the Soap King—will give three hundred thousand. Here's ten that says so!"

"Gentlemen!"

Vera Kingsley's voice rang out imperiously, and the tumult ceased.

"I say, you chaps," spoke up Lord Lynham lazily. "You are making a deuced row, you know, over a dead dog. I happen to hold the option on this painting myself."

A moan escaped Mrs. Kingsley.

"We've given it away, Vera!" she whimpered.

"Don't!" The girl rebuked her irritably. "It can't be helped now."

The picture-agent looked suspiciously at the Viscount.

"Another bargain!" was his mournful comment. "You are lucky, my lord. But my offer stands—three hundred thousand, cash down. Senator Park returns on Saturday. I will call on you then."

He made a disconsolate bow to the ladies and walked out.

"I'll go him, Lynham; hang me if I don't!" snapped Mr. Hendricks. "My board will stand behind me. Three hundred thousand! And it's for a public institution, don't forget that—for the people!"

"If I decide to sell, I'll let you hear from me, old chap," said his lordship cordially. "Naturally you would have the preference to that cad Hopkins."

"Ah! Thank you, Lynham. Ladies—gentlemen—I bid you good day."

When he had gone Miss Kingsley addressed Lord Lynham with biting sarcasm.

"Well, my lord, are you satisfied with your mare's nest? If I had waited but another day the profit you will take would have been ours."

Mrs. Kingsley moaned pitiably, twice. Lord Lynham shrugged his shoulders.

"My dear young lady," he replied, "in the expressive phraseology of your countrymen, business is business. Let it rest there, please. Now, with your permission, I will step into the hall and confer with my friends."

The girl inclined her head coldly, and Lord Lynham took Charley and Mr. Teeters by the arm and withdrew into the hall.

"Say, Harry," burst out Mr. Teeters, "I'm dizzy as a mutt on a merry-go-round, with all that money talk. Three hundred thousand seeds for a pint of paint on a yard of cotton? O mother dear, fan me!"

"And there's the frame," said Charley.

Lord Lynham laughed lightly.

"Worth another hundred thousand easily. Eh—what? But joking aside, Charley, here's a chance to make a pot of money; and I can't swing it, by Jove! I can only manage seventy-five thousand dollars.

"I was going to cable the pater for the rest, and if I couldn't hear from him in time, get the option extended. But the fat's in the fire now with Hopkins and Hendricks nosing in. That girl in there wouldn't give me ten seconds' leeway."

"Not five," said Charley, showing concern.

"Exactly! So, as the matter stands," went on Lynham, "it has occurred to me that perhaps you might like to come in, old chap—half and half—and pick a plum with me. What?"

NOW, as the reader of these veracious tales well knows, Mr. Carter was traveling largely on his reputation as a millionaire. A reputation for wealth will carry one a long way, but when it comes to an actual showdown—as in draw-poker or, as in this case, picture-buying—it is only the ready cash that counts.

Mr. Carter knew this. Starting with a "shoestring" of ten thousand dollars, he had

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through good luck, or some other quality, built up in a few weeks a bank-balance of nearly eighty thousand dollars, and paid expenses as he went along. Accurately stated, his balance was seventy nine thousand three hundred and fifty dollars. Yet the thought of risking practically his entire capital in a totally untried field of investment did not, somehow, cause him marked disquiet.

"I get you," he notified Lord Lynham. "You put up seventy-five thousand. I match it. Share and share alike. That it?"

"In a nutshell," asseverated the Englishman.

Doubt still assailed Mr. Carter, it seemed.

"Cup and lip. You know how it goes—many a slip. What about it?" He desired to be informed.

"No fear. I know Hendricks. I—dash it, my dear boy, I will guarantee the sale!"

"Fine! I'm on!" replied Mr. Carter promptly.

"I should worry!" exulted Mr. Teeters. "It's like dreaming it's raining money and waking up to find it sticking to your clothes."

"How about that twenty, Harry? Egg in mare's nest. Ready to hatch. What?" Charley put the question with a sly grin.

"Gad, I've lost!" exclaimed Lord Lynham. He handed over the amount in merry mood, and led the way back into the parlor. As he entered, the ladies regarded him attentively.

"Mr. Carter and I have agreed to buy the Titian jointly," he announced.

"Cash!" exploded Mrs. Kingsley.

Lynham smiled good-humoredly, and looked at Charley.

"Sure," said Mr. Carter. "Anything to oblige."

"As you say," assented Lynham. "Tomorrow, then, at eleven o'clock——"

"Make it one," requested Mr. Carter. "Got to go to the bank. Downtown."

"At one, then, Mrs. Kingsley," amended his lordship, "we shall be prepared to conclude the matter."

"On the dot," asserted Charley. "Little lunch in my rooms to celebrate. Just the five of us—no more. I'll send a car down. Bring the picture with you. Right, Harry?"

"Eh? What?" Lord Lynham seemed to be somewhat perturbed. "I was thinking we'd better come here. Matter of business, old chap—selling and buying—nothing social about it."

Charley looked his disappointment.

"Pleasure to entertain the ladies," he declared. "Friends. Leave it to Miss Kingsley."

The girl smoothed the frown on her brow, and answered winningly:

"I am in your debt, Mr. Carter—and in yours, Mr. Teeters—and we shall be delighted to come. Mother?"

"Delighted," parroted Mrs. Kingsley.

"Oh, put it that way," yielded Lord Lynham gracefully, "pray believe that I shall be delighted, too. Shall we go, Charley?"

"Ready," responded Mr. Carter. He bent over and whispered to Miss Kingsley and her mother: "Good old sport, Harry. Make it right with you when we sell the picture. Share the profits. Only fair."

Mrs. Kingsley gazed at him blankly, but her daughter, who was of a more nimble wit, thanked him with her matchless eyes.

"What a generous gentleman you are!" she whispered back.

A moment later, when the front door had closed on Charley, the young woman, who had stood with her finger to her lips, listening, burst into a peal of laughter. Then, snatching the older woman from her chair, she tangoed up and down the room with her until they both were out of breath.

IV

LORD LYNHAM, it seemed, had encountered the ladies at the entrance of the Hotel Rirebien. He escorted them up to Mr. Carter's apartments, and almost immediately they were followed by a porter staggering under the Titian.

"You've had it boxed!" Charley exclaimed.

"I was afraid something might happen to it," explained Miss Kingsley. "It is not insured."

"If that Tishern was mine," observed Mr. Teeters, "I'd die for want of sleep, just sitting up to shoo the flies off it. Lawsygawsy! I'd be afraid of fire, thieves, thunder and lightning, and the ghost of J. P. Morgan!"

He cackled at this conceit, and to hisastonishment drew a titter from Mrs. Kingsley.

"Wait, Jim," called Charley to the porter, who was leaving. "Want you to open this."

The porter produced a hammer and chisel from somewhere, and fell ravenously on the

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box. He knew Mr. Carter and the amplitude of his tips. But this was a consideration that had no weight with Lynham.

"I say, old chap, don't you think we'd better leave it as it is?" he suggested. "We shall only have to pack it up again to send to Hendricks. What?"

"It would save you trouble," remarked Miss Kingsley, indolently seating herself near her mother.

"Jim lives on trouble," grinned Charley. "Eats it. And I want to see the picture again. Got to brush up on art now. May take another flyer.'

"Oh, have it as you wish," said Viscount Lynham. He took an enameled cigarette-case from his pocket, and glanced at the ladies. "Have I your permission?" he asked, and without waiting for it struck a light.

Mr. Teeters helped the porter lift the Titian from the box. Charley placed a chair to one side, facing the windows, and on this they set the painting. The shades were high, and the light fell full upon it. Miss Kingsley and her mother looked on at the proceeding with a degree of uneasiness induced, presumably, by fears for the safety of the treasure. Lord Lynham leaned idly against the chimneypiece, and inhaled his cigarette luxuriously.

"That will do, Jim," said Charley. He tossed a silver dollar to the man, who ducked his head and slipped out.

"Say, Come-On," cried Mr. Teeters, who had taken up a position before the picture. "This 'Lady of the Loadyer' was a gay young skirt all right—I'll bet a hat on it. Pipe her lamps! She looks like a little joke I know in the chorus 'round at the Casino. Didn't notice it yesterday."

Charley went and stood beside him.

"It's the light, I guess," he said gravely. "Shows it up better." He studied the canvas with an absorbed air. "When did you say it was painted, Harry?" he questioned.

Mrs. Kingsley turned sharply to Lord Lynham, but Miss Kingsley let her eyes dwell on Mr. Carter's face.

"Titian," replied his lordship, slowly exhaling a thin stream of smoke through his nostrils, "lived over four hundred years ago, my dear friend."

"My!" said Mr. Carter reverently; and at his tone Miss Kingsley's eyes fell.

"Shall we proceed to business," went on Lord Lynham, "and lunch afterward?"

"Business first," returned Charley briskly. "Let's sit up to the table."

"Righto!" agreed Lynham, and he and Mr. Teeters drew up chairs for the ladies. Mrs. Kingsley displayed sudden animation.

"I'm not a bit hungry," she announced, beaming around the board.

"Nor am I, though I may be later," avowed Miss Kingsley with a laugh.

Charley gazed at her in open admiration. She was indeed a beautiful creature, with her red-gold hair and beryl eyes; a girl a man might face a cannon for, if only—But here Charley dropped from sentiment to hard horse-sense and winked at, instead of worshiping, the goddess.

"Look!" he said. "May help along your appetite. Greens from Uncle Sam's garden."

He spread out fanwise before him on the table eight bank-notes. Seven were for ten thousand dollars each, and one was for five. Mrs. Kingsley caught her breath at the sight, but the girl laughed gaily.

"Oh, I feel my hunger growing!" she rippled.

"I," broke out Mr. Teeters passionately, "could eat 'em raw!"

"Ready, Harry?" queried Mr. Carter. "Cash, you know. Mrs. Kingsley said it."

"I did!" asserted Mrs. Kingsley with emphasis. "Safety-deposit vaults for me."

Lord Lynham shoved across the table to Charley a thick batch of bills.

"I think you'll find that right—seventy-five thousand dollars, less the option. You fix it up, old chap, and get the business over with. It's dragging."

Mr. Carter surveyed the company with solicitude.

"Got a word to say first," he remarked.

"Well?" It was Mrs. Kingsley, and her voice was anxious.

"I'm scared," continued Charley, trying to assume the appropriate expression. "Got the shakes. Can't afford to drop this roll. If Hendricks doesn't buy——"

"Oh, but my dear boy! He will," Lynham interrupted. "And besides, I have guaranteed the sale."

"I don't see how you can lose in that case," said Miss Kingsley brightly. "Lord Lynham's word is his bond, of course."

"Ha!" vociferated Mr. Teeters. "I wish he'd promise me a million. What's eating you, Come-On?"

"That option," replied Charley. "If Mrs.

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Kingsley would extend it——"

The lady cut him short with a burst of ironical laughter—forgetful, evidently, of Charley's generous promise to share the profits with her.

"Excellent!" she cried. "And let you get the three hundred thousand we could get ourselves? Not a minute later than two-thirty!"

"Really, old chap," expostulated the Viscount, "this is farcical, you know."

"Guess it is," conceded Charley. "But if you should die—or Hendricks? By George! Say! Where'd I be?"

"Merry Moses! I never thought of that!" ejaculated Mr. Teeters. "People do croak, you know, Harry, when they ain't looking for it—sudden, like the waiter spilling soup down your back. He don't blow a horn before he does it."

"Oh, I say!" protested Lynham, struggling with his impatience. "What do you want me to do, Carter—sign a note? Eh?"

Charley broke into a broad smile.

"Bully!" he exclaimed. "Make your estate liable. Have to pay. Wait!" He rummaged in an inner pocket. "Here's a note. Luck! And here's my pen. Make it on demand. One hundred and fifty thousand. Hendricks pays you, and you pay me. Simple! What?"

"Simple as sitting down on nothing," was Mr. Teeters' interjected comment.

LORD LYNHAM lifted his shoulders by way of answer and, screwing his monocle in his eye, engaged in the task of drawing up the note. Charley meanwhile carelessly ran through the little mound of bank-notes before him.

"This, I trust, finishes the affair," observed his lordship peevishly, passing back to Charley the pen and the note. "I'm dashed if you wouldn't think we were buying the Bank of England."

"It is as good as the Bank of England—Lord Lynham's note, I am sure," declared Miss Kingsley.

"Good as gold," affirmed the elder lady.

Charley started suddenly.

"Was that some one at the door, Percy?" he asked in a voice inordinately loud.

As if in prearranged response, the door was thrust open, and a young man of slight build, but with a bold blue eye, strolled in.

"Hello, sport!" he accosted Mr. Carter, and slapped him on the back. "Thought I'd drop in and feel your pulse. What are you doing with that bunch of kale—dealing faro? Hey, there, Skeeters, playing capper?"

Mr. Teeters fidgeted in his chair. Lord Lynham focused his glass on the loud young man and stared. Charley made apologies for the intrusion.

"Friend of mine," he said. "Teddy Ball."

He let the introduction rest there, but Mr. Ball was not at all unhinged by this omission. He bowed with easy grace, and inquired genially:

"What's the game? Cutting a melon?"

"Buying a picture," answered Charley. "A Tishyan. Four hundred years old. In that chair. Have a look."

" 'Pon my word, Carter, this is going a little far," spoke up Lord Lynham with pronounced irritation. "I would suggest that your friend retire until we conclude our business. In short—er—I must request it."

"Oh, don't mind me," said Mr. Ball pleasantly. "And besides, I've nowhere to go. So this is the Titian, eh? What's the purse it's hung up for?"

"One hundred and fifty thousand dollars," Mr. Carter informed him. "Dirt cheap."

"One hundred and what?" quizzed Mr. Ball jocosely. "Why say, Charley, I can buy this sort down in Grand Street by the dozen at twenty dollars apiece—frame and all. Quit your kidding!"

For ten seconds the silence in the room was so acute that one could have heard through it a spider spin his web. Then it was broken by a cackle from Mr. Teeters.

"Turn over, Teddy!" he hooted. "You're talking in your sleep."

But Lord Lynham was not in jesting mood. He arose to his feet, elegant and haughty.

"Who is this beastly bounder?" he demanded sternly of Mr. Carter. "If he intends his remark as a joke it is ill timed, and I—eh—resent it!"

"He's nobody in particular," replied Charley evenly. "Only Teddy Ball. Sporting-editor of the *Scream*."

Mrs. Kingsley paled, and her daughter's red lips tightened. Lord Lynham's monocle clattered down on his vest.

"Sporting-editor?" he sneered. "Naturally he knows a Titian when he sees it—naturally!"

"A Titian, is it?" mocked Mr. Ball.

He seized the painting, whirled it around

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and dashed his fist into the flimsy pine-board backing. It splintered, and he ripped the pieces off until the canvas was revealed.

"A Titian, hey?" repeated Mr. Ball. "Look at this!" He pointed to a purple brand imprinted on the cheap cloth—and he had taken a long chance on finding it on this particular cut from the bolt. " 'Gainesville Cotton Mills,' " he read out. "Huh! Maybe I don't know a Titian when I see it, but I've got a hunch that old guy never bought his calico in Georgia four hundred years ago."

"Gollamighty!" croaked Mr. Teeters, and slumped down in his chair.

"Harry, it's a plant!" shrilled Miss Vera Kingsley, her aquamarine eyes flashing fire.

"Pass that money back!" hissed Lynham, jumping for Mr. Carter.

Charley side-stepped him; the bank-notes were in his pocket, and his coat was buttoned over them.

"Don't make me hit you, Harry," he begged. "I've rather liked you, and I'd hate to muss you up. It was a gamble whether you'd get my money or I'd get yours. You started it. Take your medicine."

Lord Lynham's hand shot back to his hip pocket, but Mr. Ball was a bit ahead of him. He poked an automatic at his lordship, and remarked airily:

"No use, old top. I'll make a sieve look as solid as a dinner-plate compared to the way you'll look if you're hunting trouble. Why, 'London Harry,' I knew it was you the minute Charley told me this morning what was doing. There's a finish to your work that puts the other con men in the raw-material class."

"It's that gig-lamp—the way he wears it—that done the trick," threw in Mr. Teeters mournfully.

Mr. Ball went on, heedless of the interruption:

"And by the way, dear old chap, the house detective is standing at the door. Which would you prefer—to walk out quietly, for the ladies' sake, or all of you take a ride down to Mulberry Street? The ride would make better reading for the *Scream*, but Charley seems to lean to the walkout. What do you say?"

London Harry, being a philosopher accepted the situation without parley.

"Thanks, my good fellow," he drawled, returning to his character. "Mr. Carter's way is less conspicuous and on the whole more agreeable, I fancy."

"Possibly Mr. Carter will permit us to take our leave at once?" hinted Miss Kingsley; and she smiled on Charley with the sweetness of a werwolf baring its fangs.

"Sure," said Charley cordially. "Sorry, though, you won't stay to lunch. Some other time perhaps—at Tortoni's."

"Or elsewhere," the girl rejoined, with a slow nodding of her handsome head which portended ill for Mr. Carter should they meet again.

But he only laughed, and going to the door drew it open.

"It's all right, Tom," he assured the man outside. "Nothing doing." He turned to Lynham as the detective moved away. "By George! Didn't we have a bet up, Harry? You said you'd buy the picture—a hundred even? Sure you did.

"And you're going to do it. Can't disappoint the ladies. Wait a minute. I'll fix it." He flattened Lynham's promissory note against the wall and indorsed it. "There you are, Mrs. Kingsley," he cried, forcing the paper into the lady's nerveless hand. "Payable to your order. Good as gold. You said it was; and it pays for the Tishyan. I'll send it around to you, Harry. You can mail me your check for the hundred. Any old time. Good-by—good luck—and regards to Mr. Hendricks."

Charley stepped back into the room with Mr. Ball. Mr. Teeters still sat slumped in his chair like a bag of wet sawdust.

"Come-On, I wouldn't 'a' believed it!" he lamented in a hollow voice.

"They might have got me," Charley grinned. "Close shave."

"Hey?" Mr. Teeters was puzzled.

"They overacted," explained Charley. "That last little scene at the Spenditt. Played it just a shade too fine."

Mr. Ball, in the midst of igniting a dark and corpulent cigar, paused.

"Ho! I see!" he observed. "Got a peek in behind the curtain and saw the finish. Put you wise!"

"Sure," said Charley.

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The Chechakos

By E. Kirby Keener

TALKIN' about "chechakos," I know it ain't customary to take 'em very serious, but now an' then there comes one that makes the "sour-doughs" sit up nights an' think.

I used to boast that I could pick 'em out on sight; but I got stuck once, an' s'help me, I'm stuck to this very day.

That was a long time ago; before frontierin' in the Far North become a part o' history.

It was up at Becker's cache. There wasn't no excitement there exactly, but some color had been struck, an' now an' then a few prospectors would drop off on their way up to the live camps an' hang around a while.

"Drink" Purcell had moved his fixtures up from Kloosisnoo an' opened up a bar and gamblin'-house, with a dance-hall in the rear.

There was about a hundred souls all told, includin' Drink's wife—an' some dozen others of the gentle sex he'd brought along to keep the nuggets from sweatin' in the fellers' pockets, don't you know?

Things was sort o' quiet-like. A bunch of us was standin' down the line, pow-wowin' about one thing an' other, when a team rounds over the hill and brings up short, a few paces from where we stood.

Rank chechakos. You could tell 'em a mile.

Natural enough, we closes up to look 'em over.

The man slips off the sled an' steps up with a pleasant salute. Tall man, about forty, of the high-brow type; clean-shaved, stood erect, an' spoke proper as a Boston tutor.

Say, but that was some outfit! Everything bran' new, an' the best that money could buy.

They wore lynx parkas, with the hoods bordered with Arctic fox instead of Spitz fur. The sled was big an' stanch, built on gosome lines. They drove nine dogs, all Malemutes except the leader. He was a big ball-faced brute; looked like a cross between a wolfhound an' a saber-toothed lion; an' meaner 'an ol' Nick himself.

But the girl! A mere slip of a lass. Oh, I'll never forget the first time I set eyes on that face o' hers. Man! It was more gorgeous than a sunflower bloomin' in the middle of an ice floe. She was awful tall and pretty slender, but full-busted an' graceful as a fairy. Golden hair—none o' your bottle blondes — eyes blue as a Winter sky, cherry lips, an' genuine pearls for teeth. Yes, dimples, too, an' cheeks aglow with the cold.

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But—do you know?—some men ain't got no sense. Cripples, nohow; they never keep a cripple's place.

Now them folks had come in like gentlemen and give a good account o' theirselves, as well as the news from below. The girl was passin' around some papers, along with a magazine or two, when ol' one-armed "Wing" Putney, born bone-head, mistakes her sweetness an' tries to freshen up to her.

She snubs him, *pronto*, an' Mr. Neal—Edward Neal, that's the name he give us—sees somethin's wrong an' asks her, "What is it, dear?" like he was addressin' a angel.

"It is nothing, Edward," she says, walkin' around the sled an' takin' her seat with her face the other way. "The man really doesn't know any better."

That hacks Putney, so he flushes up an' tries to come back at her.

"Mebby I don't," he says; "but," turnin' to the man, "you can take it from me: you needn't try to put that chicken to work in the hall here. We may be shy on manners an' fine talk, but we don't stand for no cradle-robbin' in this camp, so you'd better beat it while the sleddin's good."

Zowie! That chechako raps Wing full across the face with the butt-end of his whip, layin' him full length in the snow, and drags a double-barreled shotgun from under the lap-robe, as if he expects the whole caboodle of us to sail in an' eat him up. But if anybody had any such a notion, he took a sudden change o' heart, for that gun was a number six gage breech-loader—the only six I ever saw.

Great Scott! It looked fit to exterminate the whole genus hippopotamus at one shot. O' course we didn't know what he might do with it, 'cause he was white mad; but we just couldn't help but laugh, it was that huge.

"See here!" he says. "Perhaps you people are not accustomed to meeting women who demand respect, but Mrs. Neal does; and you are going to respect her if I have to kill the last one of you. Is that clear?"

"Perfectly clear," I says, speakin' for the crowd.

We could see in his eye that he was a-goin' to make it stick, an' somebody was about to 'pologize; but just then Purcell elbows into evidence with his cut-out wide open, in quest of information.

Right there the stranger pipes him off for the Big Chief o' the village, an' levels the twin subway square betwixt his eyes, with both hammers back.

Now Purcell was a big man, an' reckoned to be a brave man, but he didn't show no inclination to bite the sight off o' that fusee, an' calms down with considerable less conversation than usual, for him.

I explained how Wing come to get in bad, an' when Drink had absorbed it somewhat, he extends a little sympathy to the poor feller by way of mentionin' that it was too bad he didn't ketch his tongue in the bear-trap same time he did his arm, an' lose it too. Then, just because the stranger had lowered the sights a notch or two, he adds a few lines about chechakos comin' in with a chip on their shoulder.

"No, we've no chips on our shoulders," Mr. Neal snaps back, trainin' the coal-burner straight at Drink's solar plexus from a hip-position. "All we ask is a chance to mind our own business and be treated half as fairly as we'll treat others."

"That sounds reasonable," says Drink. "Put up your cannon an' come along."

We cleared the trail as the newcomer brings his long, heavy whip once around an' lets her pop over the dogs' backs.

"Stand by!" he shouts. An' they were up an' layin' to their collars. "Starboard, Ball!" The dogs swung gee.

A wrenchin' tug at the gee-pole, an' the sled broke out with a lurch.

"Steady, Ball!" an' the ball-faced leader swung 'em back into the trail.

No, he didn't say "mush" nor "gee" nor "haw." They must ha' been sea-dogs, 'cause they sure savvied that ship-lingo.

THE strangers halted quite a ways above the town an' pitched their tent right off. That day they looks about a little, an' the first thing we knowed they had the finest cabin along the pass.

Mind their own business? I guess they did. Always come to the store together, done their tradin' an' hikes right back.

He might ha' been a chechako—I say he might ha' been—but what he didn't know about gettin' down through froze ground with a wood-fire wasn't worth your time a-learnin'. Never asks no questions, but he sure could answer 'em.

He never comes into Purcell's—never but the once. Nobody'll ever forget it. He just devotes his spare time to entertainin' little

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Nell—"Sweet Nell," that's what he always called her. Ah, but he was good to her! They chums around like two twins, takin' long jaunts up an' down the line with the sled, an' by ginger! how he could handle them pups; always talkin' ship-Latin to 'em an' a-goin' like fury.

But they wasn't sociable. Never mixed with nobody.

Purcell runs up a shack not far from theirs an' tries to hob-nob with 'em, but they cuts him to the tune of a hundred an' one below zero, an' sticks to it—till Drink's wife takes down with the pneumonia. Then the little Missus just waits on Ella, hand an' foot. That's how it started.

Then Terry Doughton, "Handsome Terry," Ella's brother, supposed to be, turns up to sort o' help Drink out by takin' charge of the dance-floor, an' got to hangin' 'round the Purcell *igloo* pretty plenty; all under pretext of belongin' to the family.

Neal had reached the drift by that time an' was under ground a good deal more than usual; then when sluicin' come he was busier than ever, so, as the girl was always home a-tendin' to her business time he got back, he didn't get next to Terry till after the clean-up; an' mebby wouldn't then, if he just hadn't a-happened to come down to the store one day, unexpected, when—who pops in but Ella and Nell, an' Terry with 'em, cuttin' up an' carryin' on as big as life!

Not a word! Neal just piles Mr. Terry over in the wood-box with a pick-handle, an' waltzed his little Sweet Nell home.

They had an awful quarrel an' like to split up, 'cause the youngster had one o' them regular blonde wills of her own; but they patched it up somehow. Of course she "promised" without the slightest intention of keepin' her word, like women do when they get sore, an' kept right on trottin' with Ella.

Terry was only supposed to be a side issue; just Ella's brother, see? But he was on the ground plenty steady all the same, a-trustin' to the little thirty-eight hammerless he carried in his mackinaw pocket to preserve his good looks in case the "green-eyed monster" should start another shower o' pick-handles his way. The skunk knew he was out of his element.

Ella tries time an' again to lure the kid into the joint, under pretense of wantin' to speak to her husband, an' finally, one rough day, the girl steps inside just for a minute; but was shy as a fawn. Next time it was easier, an' she pranced right in without havin' to be coaxed.

Drink had 'em cut out all the rough stuff on the floor for the occasion, an' things didn't look so bad on the face of 'em. Ella introduced her to several of the "smooth articles," an' Terry explains the "wheel" an' the "bank" an' what not to her, all the time edgin' her over toward the dance-floor, an' then tries to get her to dance. But she balked at that though, sayin' she'd have to be gettin' home.

Now, mind you, we sets there, all of us, takin' it all in, seein' through the play. There was no doubt about it; they was simply doin' their darnedest to drag that sweet, innocent young thing into the worst life a woman can lead.

Yet nobody says a word. Just like a picnic-party watchin' a gang o' train-wreckers pull a rail to ditch a train, an' never crookin' a finger to flag the engine, 'cause it wasn't their affair.

Oh, I can see it all now. It was our affair. It's always up to the disinterested to uphold what's right an' protect the innocent, 'cause when folks is tempted by pleasure or profit their conscience is more apt to be biased than them that just looks on.

Now, with Purcell, women was merely so much stock-in-trade; the younger the better, get 'em as he might. Ella was no more nor less than a professional cat's-paw, so it was her bread an' butter to ketch a gold-fish whenever she could. An' Terry? Why, it wouldn't take no Greek philosopher to figger out his temptation. So there you are.

WELL, the snows had come, the creek was 'most froze over, an' the trail was pretty fair. Neal sets out for a load o' wood one afternoon, but somehow changed his mind an' comes back after a few minutes. The little Missus is out.

Over to the Purcell cabin he goes—nobody home. Then he saunters down to Becker's store; but that ain't the right track yet, so he takes a mosey 'round back o' the dance-hall an' sees Nell through the window, a-dancin' with Terry. She sees him at the same time an' drops in a heap, cold as ice.

Ella couldn't budge a word out of her, an' she kicks an' spits when they tries to pour a life-saver down her. Then the two of 'em drilled for home right off, missin' Neal.

Anyway, Terry was tilted back with his

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feet cocked up on a green table, lordin' it over the rest of us like a peacock, an' Drink was standin' with his hand on Terry's shoulder, praisin' him for his clever work an' lookin' mighty radiant over the prospects o' havin' a new an' valuable acquisition to his establishment, when Neal busts in the front-door with the hippopotamus-gun at full cock. We 'most pokes our fingers through the roof, gettin' our hands up.

"Purcell," said he quiet-like, "you two woman-ghouls have wrecked my home, and this is the price——"

Well, it was an awful price, but I don't reckon we'd ha' started nothin' rash, if it hadn't been on account o' them two women, 'cause it was nothin' short o' what was due 'em, Drink an' Terry.

But when it comes to women, 'specially on the frontier where they are scarce, chivalry runs rampant when sentiment touches on their side, no matter what their stamp is or how much they are to blame. So, when a delegation of us goes up to break the news to Ella, an' finds 'em both stretched out on the floor, there was somethin' doin' P. D. Q.

Crazed with grief, no doubt, over the young wife he loved so well, an' trusted, too, havin' stepped within the gates o' hell, an' wrought to the pit of his soul against an older woman for draggin' her there, he'd just plied that heavy, shot-filled dog-whip till he was plumb beside hisself; lost all notion o' when to quit; red-eyed, killin' mad.

He'd packed his sled, tent an' all, and quit the camp.

We thought the women had both cashed in their checks, but the girl comes out of it after a spell, an' we totes her down to the store so's the other women could dope her up with patent liniment an' stickin'-plaster while us men was a-makin' up the posse.

Oh, she pleads with us not to go. Tries to shoulder all the blame herself, 'cause she'd deceived her husband, an' upbraids us somethin' fierce for puttin' our noses in after the damage was all done.

She allows that accounts was squared with all parties concerned, an' claims that they was a-playin' the game with their eyes wide open an', since we all seemed willin' enough to stand for seein' 'em win, we ought to stand just the same for seein' 'em lose. She said he'd go 'way an' mind his own business if people'd give him half a chance; but if we forced him to fight for his life he'd sell it so mighty dear that we'd all regret the price as long as any of us lived.

But you know that sort o' talk don't go in the border-land, 'specially when the boys gets their heads set on bringin' a feller back, so we rakes up all the shootin-irons in the place an' sets out, about twenty strong.

We was mushin' along at a good stiff trot, a little above Neal's cabin, calculatin' him some ten miles to the good an' still a-goin' like a wildcat takin' a hornet home alive, when all at once his tracks give out as complete as if his dogs had took wings, like Elijah's chariot-horses, an' flew off through the sky, sled an' all.

Now that ain't a bran'-new stunt exactly, but it stops a feller's think-box from tickin' for a minute. So there's where we bunches up for a consultation of the wise—right along a wall o' rock.

"KER-WHANG! KER-WHANG!" Neal cuts loose with both barrels from behind a rock about fifty yards away, totally demoralizin' the posse. An' before we could get our wits together an' locate him, he'd shoved in a couple more shells an' let us have it on the oblique.

Well, them as could pull their legs back under 'em didn't lose no time makin' their feet behave.

Quick as a flash, he coals her up again an' comes a-jumpin', yellin' worse 'an a Comanche full o' hooch, for us to drop our guns—most of us had already. In a second all nine o' the dogs was on us like a pack o' wolves, snappin' right an' left, an' him a-givin' us both barrels as fast as he could break her an' shove in the shells.

Every time anybody'd wheel 'round to take a peck at him, he'd beat 'em to it, or the dogs would pile on. Becker tries a fluke fall to pot Neal between loads, but ol' Saber-tooth guillotined him at one snap, without even stoppin' to growl.

The dogs! The dogs! They was the worst of it; right among us, hamperin' every move. You couldn't shoot 'em without shootin' somebody else, an' you can't kick 'em off; they're too quick.

"Why didn't we——?" What? An' that ol' volcano a-belchin' flames o' fire forty feet long every other jump; an' every inch of atmosphere betwixt the earth an' moon filled with shriekin' buck-shot big as marbles, while a pack o' man-eatin' hyenas was tearin' the very flesh off your bones? Yes,

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you'd ha' done wonders if you'd ha' been there!

I reckon we've all laid awake a few nights, figgerin' out just how we might ha' turned the trick—since; but, somehow, none o' them bright ideas occurred to any of us at the time. I tell you, we was goin' south; an' them that was fit to travel, wasn't takin' no chances on stoppin' any more 'an their own share o' them lead nutmegs.

For an instant the dogs all seemed busy with them they'd pulled down, so we takes advantage o' the opportunity to surrender. Licked! Licked to a frazzle!

"Stand by!" shouts Neal.

The dogs, not a one of 'em even scratched, bounds to his side an' stands ready for a finish charge. Discipline? You bet them critters knew how to mind! He marched 'em up to within forty yards an' stops. He wore a ungodly smile an' the brutes was bristled to the tips o' their tails, whinin' to get at us again.

"Oh, you wolves!" he roars. "You'd stand by and see my beautiful Nell dragged into the pits of hell without so much as giving me a hint, that I might save her. You thought to lick the bones after the lion had had his fill, eh? Oh, I didn't say I'd give you quarter!"

At that he bent his cheek to the stock an' fired.

Wanton, was it? Fiendish? As you like. But would we ha' let him off if he'd a-surrendered to us? Well, that wasn't exactly what we had in mind when we set out, an' I hardly think we'd ha' changed our minds if he hadn't a-changed 'em for us. No, he had to do it.

An' "lick the bones"? Was there a man among us that wouldn't ha' fought for a chance to give the girl a boost on down the trail where goin's easiest, if the "lion" had succeeded in his bent?

I can see it all now. It took that much to save one good woman, an' I for one am satisfied.

I fell at the first shot, with two little forget-me-nots in my breast; but at the second report I was up an' borin' holes in space.

"Why don't he shoot?" I wondered. "No, he'll let the brutes have me."

THEN, when they didn't come, I took a slant back, hopin' he'd gone his way. But no! Here he comes, pot-shottin' every window that had a lighted lamp in it, settin' the whole town a-fire, the blood-smeared huskies close at his heels.

He didn't press me hard, for he was a bit haggard from the terrific buckin' o' that ol' coal-burner; but he had quickened up some, time I reached the store where the balance o' the town was packed in an' shakin' fierce at their jaws an' knees.

They lets me in an' bars the door—but shucks! The shack was boards. Neal just steps behind McKittrick's cabin an' takes a pot-shot at the big hangin' lamp through the window. Down she comes, riddled, with a gallon o' oil spurtin' forty ways, for the burnin' wick to touch off like a bomb.

Sure, he knows the lay o' the store an' opens fire on the stove. The first shot takes a couple o' cast-iron legs from under her; an' over she topples, coals an' blazin' chunks all over the floor.

Leave it to a woman's presence o' mind in an emergency—Big Pearl makes a dive for the drinkin'-bucket in the corner—but, that Neal wasn't overlookin' any bets. He knowed it was water that we wanted. So he just counts three an' lets drive at the corner. Pearl lets out a whoop an' drops the pail. Then he opens up a systematic fusillade down the side o' the house.

There was no back door; the windows was slit crossways instead of up an' down. They was high up at that, an' Neal had the front door covered; so there we was, blind with smoke, a-fire top an' bottom, front an' back, while flyin' splinters from the woodwork an' the powdered glass from the showcases an' the pickle-bottles on the shelves was worse 'an buckshot itself.

Now Wing Putney always was long on strategy, so he suggests a flag o' truce. But!—— That feller outside was seein' red by then. Why, that white rag hadn't caught the breeze before he whangs loose at the crack o' the door. Open she comes, the first gust of air drivin' a sheet o' flame back the full length o' the room; then it busts out the door a-whoopin'.

There was only one thing for it, so we just kicks the south side out o' the ol' shed an' piles out down the gulch like a stampede o' wild goats, trustin' to cross the creek on the ice; but it was too thin. Wing tries it, but goes through an' under. Here comes Neal, the ol' coal-burner roarin' worse 'an ever. Poor little Nell gets hers. There we was, corralled like so many Spring lambs

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in a slaughter-pen, an' quite as helpless. He steps up to his favorite forty yards, keepin' the carnivora close to him. Then he examines a forty-five Colt he'd frisked off Becker. Up comes the double-barrel ——

"Oh God, Nell! Don't let him shoot!" shrieks the Doll." "Don't let your husband shoot!"

Poor little Nell, down an' bleedin', voiceless, 'most beneath his feet, tries to raise up on one elbow, stretchin' out the other hand to him, smilin' sick-like; just a-waggin' her head slow for him to spare us. The sight o' her must ha' turned the tide within him, for he speaks in a calm voice:

"Do you unclean varmints want to live? If you do, swear! Swear that you'll not follow me. Swear that you'll never speak a word or turn a hand to convict me; nor set anybody on my trail to bring me back. 'Mukluk,' you and Penrod swear them."

Me an' "Penny" swore 'em, every one; ourselves to boot.

"Then don't you move from your tracks until I fire my gun from the rock where the fight began. Good-by."

"Ed! Oh, Edward!" shrieks the girl, in the God-forsakenest wail I ever heard, draggin' her broken body towards him like some wounded dog. "You won't go without me? Take me with you; I'm fit. I slipped, but I didn't fall. He never even touched my lips, I swear—you saved me just in time. Take me with you," she pleads—so earnest! "You can lay me down somewhere beside the trail, then stay close by till it is over. I'm clean—I swear to God I am!"

Would he do it? He did. He shoots a tiger-glance at us, then grabs her up in his arms an' totes her all the way, kissin' her as she clings around his neck.

Well, if there was a man among us that didn't bawl outright, he was ashamed to boast about it afterwards; an' the women, they just boo-hoos every time anybody'd mention Nell—"Sweet Nell"—that's what we always called her. We sees the flash; ol' "Hippo" roars farewell. It was a bad job well done.

NO, WE never heard from 'em, up the line nor down. But say, I don't mind tellin' you now, it's been so long ago. One Spring mornin', just as it was a-peepin' day, about twelve years after that, me an' that same Penny Penrod was amblin' out o' "Pop" Toberman's place that stands where Neal burnt Purcell's, jawin' about the way our cards had been a-runnin', when the crack of a whip fairly splits the air, an' a voice echoes on the front o' the house across the way. Penny pricks up his ears as if he'd heard a call from the grave.

"Port, U-know! U-know, hard a-port! Condor!"

Pop! goes the whip, an' a sled swings 'round the corner on one runner, with the dogs on a dead gallop. Down the street they comes, the lash a-singin' over their backs like sin, but never touchin' a hair. Eleven skookem "breeds," all yellow, an' 'most every one a ball-face. The sled was a-rockin' somethin' fierce an' takin' the bumps on the bound. There was three people on it; a man with white whiskers, a woman whose parka-hood blew back as they passed, exposin' a head o' blonde hair—an' a kid holdin' on for dear life.

"They'll never make it," says Penny, as they neared the dip to the creek. But they takes it like a duck. On out over the Winter trail they goes, at a plumb mad pace, to reach tide-water before the thaws set in.

"Say, Mukluk," says Penny, "was there anything about that outfit that struck you as bein' familiar?"

"Well," says I, "there never was but one man that could handle dogs as that feller was a-handlin' them—ball-faced ones at that—an' drive 'em with a salt-water jargon."

"Did you pipe the artillery the lady was holdin' across her lap?"

"Yes, that's it—an' Sweet Nell, too. Thank God she lived. That's them, a-goin' out for good."

"We've got 'phones, now," says Penny.

"Yes, an' he's got the same ol' peacemaker, too," says I. "Hope you ain't forgot? Besides, what would be the use o' precipitatin' a calamity like that upon our neighbors? All he asked was a chance to mind his business an' be treated half as fair as he'd treat us. But we didn't treat him square; not half. Anyway, we swore—that's how it comes we're a-livin' right now—an' Penny Penrod, we'll keep the oath."

"Mukluk Brown, we will," says he. An' we shakes hands.

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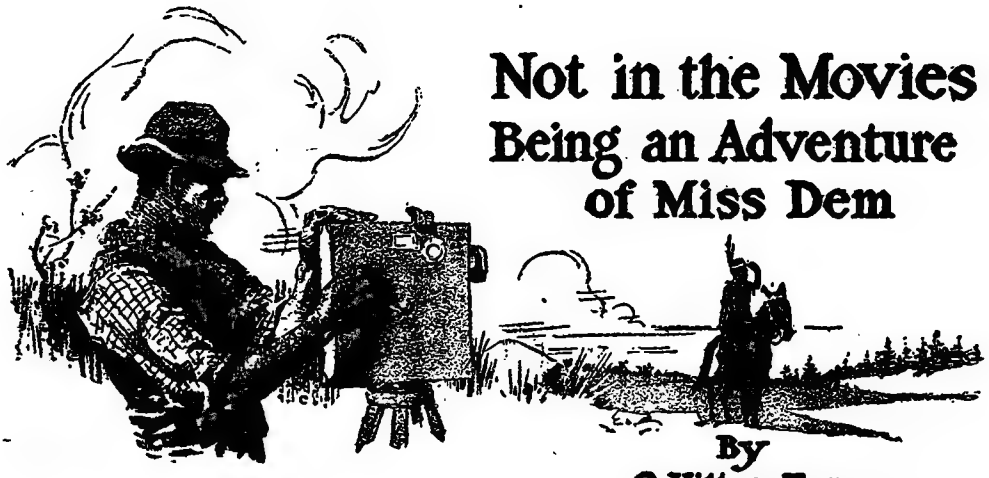

Not in the Movies
Being an Adventure of Miss Dem

By C. Hilton-Turvey

ONE morning in mid-June the "Morrison Movies" Company swarmed off the train at a small town in New Jersey. They were met by a couple of auto-trams and a businesslike man who greeted them jovially.

"You've come prepared to look pretty, I hope," he called out. "Skip in wherever you can find room!"

They piled in, laughing and joking.

After several rehearsals in the city studio, they were to go through a play outdoors in the woods, under the lens of the moving-picture camera. They were a good-looking crowd, with mobile faces and the sparkle of animation in everything they did. The art of the moving-picture actor is not to be learned in a day, with its appeal to the eye alone demanding wonderful intensification of the facial and bodily expression.

It had all the effect of a picnic as the big trams moved down the street and turned off into a country road. A cool breeze stirred the trees, and the dew was not yet dried on the grass. Two hilarious loads led the way. The man who was to pose the acts sped along on a motorcycle; and Miss Demonstrator, who had come solely in the interests of a jolly day off, brought up the rear in a small gasoline runabout that had seen better days—a good many of them.

With her rode Peggie, the soubrette, familiarly known as "Fluff." She had been unable to get a place in the trams unless she sat on somebody's lap. Some of the men clung to the steps and others squatted on the floor at the girls' feet.

So the genial little demonstrator hired the runabout for the day—the only one to be had—and invited Fluff to join her. She was a pretty good chauffeur, and had canvassed her toilet-preparations up-state a whole season in a machine that might have been the twin to this. Its antique pattern drew the cheerful jeers of the company, and added to the gaiety of the occasion.

Soon the high-power trams left it behind. But it didn't matter if they two were a bit late, for Fluff had nothing to do till the second reel. So they jogged along, taking in the country sights and sounds and enjoying the cool of the morning.

By the time they arrived the property man had put up a rough dressing-room by means of a few lengths of canvas drawn around a group of trees. The trams had been run off the road into a field. The semblance of an Indian camp had been constructed at the edge of the woods. The camera man had chosen his distance and was getting a level. Everything was bustle and preparation.

The scenario in which they were to take part was an Indian melodrama called "Dawn-Flower's Revenge."

The property man and the Director went about conferring together on the best disposition of the various properties. When all was to his satisfaction the Director clapped his hands.

"All on for the first scene!"

They came running and grouped themselves about the tents. Braves in blankets lounged in the shade, smoking long, slender

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pipes; squaws squatted by the tents, making beadwork and braiding reeds for baskets. The Director let them go half through the first scene, to "get a line on it" in the new surroundings; then——

"Back to the beginning again!" he sang out, and gave the camera man the signal to start cranking. The first part of the reel had been posed the day before in its proper locality—a railroad.

DAWN-FLOWER, an Indian maiden, gazing down the road, sees a blur of dust in the distance. She calls the attention of her father, the chief, to it. It comes nearer. A horseman rides up furiously, and dismounting, lets the reins fall to the ground in the Western fashion. The horse stops still.

The man, a handsome "heavy," takes the chief to a little distance and begs a favor of him. It transpires that he has just held up a train and, having separated from his accomplice, has ridden all night to escape his pursuers. He asks the chief to give him a hiding-place in his camp till the Sheriff and his gang go by.

The chief refuses.

The train-robber, Big Dick by name, offers gold out of the bag he carries—offers more—more—till the chief consents. He calls his braves together and instructs them. While they talk, Big Dick sees Dawn-Flower, who does not know that he is a fugitive from justice. A bit of byplay shows the beginning of love between the two.

So the plot unfolds itself, with frequent commands of "Stop!" from the Director to the camera man. Some scenes were rehearsed several times before the crank was set going. Miss Demonstrator perched on a stump outside the field of the lens and watched with interest.

A string of horses that had been tethered in the shade were loosened, mounted, and ridden up the road for a start. At the proper moment they come tearing back—the Sheriff and his men—and draw rein at the Indian camp. After a few questions, answered in the negative by the chief and his braves, they gallop on down the road. When they are out of sight Big Dick comes from one of the tents. He looks down the road, where a cloud of dust still lingers, and laughs joyously.

That night, while the Indians are asleep, he steals cautiously out of the camp and goes deeper into the woods to hide his stolen treasure. He thinks himself alone. But Dawn-Flower has seen him leave the camp and fears that he is going away. He has made love to her and won her heart. She follows him. Hidden behind a clump of bushes, she watches while he digs a hole and buries the bags of gold, as well as jewelry wrapped in a bandanna he unties from his throat. Afterward he strews earth, rocks and leaves on top, replacing the vines cunningly, so that no one shall suspect that the earth has been disturbed.

Big Dick remains with the Indians several days; then, finding that no one suspects him of the robbery, goes swaggering back to town, having taken a sentimental leave of Dawn-Flower.

After a few days the Indian maid can endure his absence no longer. She walks into town seeking him. On the way she sees a placard nailed to a tree, offering a reward for information leading to the arrest of the train-robbers. It gives the date of the holdup and the place where it happened. Dawn-Flower is aghast. She realizes that Big Dick is the bandit, and she determines to do all she can to shield him.

Meanwhile Big Dick has made the acquaintance of a city girl who, with her father, a wealthy man, is touring the West. She is staying in the town while her father looks over some desirable land. The "town" in this case consists of a few farm-shacks properly manipulated, a little farther up the road.

The girl in the case is Fluff, in a charming frock and hat, carrying the inevitable parasol. She walks past the country store. Big Dick sees her, and, rushing out, asks if he may accompany her. They stroll down the road together. Big Dick holds her hands and begs her to love him.

At this moment Dawn-Flower peers out from behind a bush. She is stricken with grief and anger. Her love for Big Dick turns to hate. She steps out as they move on, and makes a gesture of vengeance after her faithless lover.

AT THIS point the Director clapped his hands.

"All out for rest and lunch!" he called, and set the pace for the rest by making for the shade—taking his hat off as he went and mopping his brow, for it was sultry noon and after.

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One of the men rode to a near-by farmhouse and returned with a brimming pail of milk. Sandwiches were passed around—a snack to carry the performers through the rest of the work. The horses were watered and fed. The camera man lolled under a tree, glad to be off his feet for a while.

The Indian chief, the bandit, Dawn-Flower, and the interloper, Fluff, sat down in a friendly group with Miss Demonstrator. As they ate they talked shop—discussed scenarios, and the difficulties they had met with in posing before the camera.

The Indian chief drained a glass of cold milk and set the "empty" on the grass beside him.

"Where's Flossie Deans now?" he asked Miss Demonstrator. "The pretty girl who did juveniles with the Smart Films?"

Miss Demonstrator chuckled.

"Oh, poor Flossie did so many juveniles that at the end of the year she couldn't talk plain—if she'd kept on any longer she'd have needed a rattle and a pacifier. So she cut loose and went on the road with the China Doll Burlesques."

"Same here," remarked Big Dick, knocking his pipe against the root of a tree. "I came into the Morrison Movies because I needed a change. I played leads opposite Fernie May for two seasons; and, I got so used to goggling at Fernie that I couldn't look into the mirror without a shock of surprise to see my own face instead of Fernie's. She said she felt the same way about me."

"I like this company," Dawn-Flower announced. "The heads of it take such a personal interest. Mr. Billy used to come down to rehearsal every day until——"

"Who's Mr. Billy?" asked Miss Demonstrator, leaning comfortably against a tree-trunk and munching a sandwich.

"Billy Morrison, the young millionaire who's put so much money into the show," replied Dawn-Flower. "He's daffy about the movies. They say he's blown in half a million getting the Morrison Movies started."

"A good fellow all right," Big Dick commended heartily. "A mixer from the word go—even if he has the rocks. He was coming out with us today, but——"

"He brought little Billy with him a couple of weeks ago," Fluff put in, "and he's the cunningest little tad; yellow hair and eyes as brown as——"

"Some kid, that!" Big Dick assented. He put his hat under his head for a pillow and lay comfortably prone. "The little beggar bumped his head against something in the studio—no love-tap, mind you, but a bang you could hear clear across the room. And he never said boo; just rubbed it, and bucked up like a man."

"Pretty good for a baby of five!" the Indian chief remarked approvingly, rolling another cigarette between his ochred fingers.

"We won't see much of Mr. Billy for a while," Fluff observed, "now that——"

"Poor fellow!" Dawn-Flower said. "They say he's half crazy since——"

"I don't wonder," Big Dick put in. "If it happened to me——"

"All in!" called the Director.

They arose with alacrity and took up their various stations. Big Dick picked up his hat and, dusting it off on his sleeve, prepared to be as villainous as possible. Dawn-Flower ran swiftly to the road and assumed the vengeful expression demanded. Fluff shook out her skirts and tried to look rich and pampered. The Indian chief threw away his cigarette with a parting whiff, and curled his fingers around a calumet. Altogether the friendly group of a moment before looked anything but friendly as they got into their parts again.

THE next scene begins with the struggle in Dawn-Flower's heart between love and hate. Again and again she goes to the Sheriff's office, prepared to knock and to tell the official all she knows. Each time she is deterred by the sight of the placard offering a reward for the capture of the bandit.

The idea of giving him over to justice—of seeing him no more for years! She drops her hand from the door, shakes her head, and turns away. (Business of the Sheriff's men lounging at the window inside and laughing at her.) If she keeps silent, her lover can come and go in the town, safe and unsuspected.

A shadow falls across her path—the parasol of the city girl as she strolls past. Dawn-Flower shrinks out of her way and looks after her. Yes! If she is silent, Big Dick can be free to come and go in the town—can make love to the white girl—can scoff at the Indian maid—— Never! Her eyes flash; her lithe body stiffens. She springs

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to the door and knocks fiercely upon it.

It opens. The Sheriff stands before her—stern-faced, powerful, the embodiment of the law. Dawn-Flower falters out her story.

The other men peer over the Sheriff's shoulder, listening. They smile and shake their heads. They do not believe her. Big Dick has covered his tracks too well. The Sheriff concurs with his men that Dawn-Flower has made a mistake.

She offers to take them to the place where Big Dick has hidden the loot. They confer together. Finally they decide to prove the truth of Dawn-Flower's statements. They mount their horses. Taking Dawn-Flower on the saddle in front of him, the Sheriff, guided by her, leads the way up the road, across a field, and into the woods. When they come near to the place where the treasure is hidden the Indian maid slides off the horse to the ground and walks cautiously ahead, that she may not miss the spot.

"STOP!" called the Director to the camera man. He turned to the actors.

"Look 'round straight into the camera, Dawn-Flower, when you see the place. Then turn on your full expression where the audience can get it. You want to look as if you'd throw the whole thing up for two cents—the place brings all sorts of sentimental memories. Take a side step as if you were going to cut and run—see? Then, still looking right into the lens, change your face—get hard—remember the other girl. You did it better than this yesterday."

"This way?" Dawn Flower asked, stepping forward and "turning on the expression."

"Yes, yes!" the Director replied. "There, that's a good touch—clench your hands and stiffen up a bit." He nodded over his shoulder to the camera man. "Go ahead!"

THE Sheriff and his men dismount and follow Dawn-Flower to a space between the trees. She moves the leaves aside with one moccasined foot.

One of the men steps to her side and digs with a spade in the earth. In a moment he throws down the spade and, stooping, picks up a bag of gold. The men crowd about him and examine it. The bandanna handkerchief comes to light, stuffed full of watches and rings, and other jewelry. The Sheriff leans forward and takes out a ring. He looks closely at it and hands it to the rest to see. It is one of the pieces of jewelry lost in the train-robbery.

A man fingers the bandanna. He nods his head and says:

"This belongs to Big Dick. I saw it around his neck the day of the holdup!"

They ride back to town.

Big Dick is sitting on a step, flirting with the city girl. He does not suspect anything till the Sheriff rides up to him, and getting the drop on him, cries, "Hands up!"

The bandit rises to his feet and raising his hands above his head looks defiantly about him. The girl shrinks away in horror and sinks down in a faint on the step.

"STOP!" called the Director again to the camera man. He went into the scene and lifted the city girl to her feet. "Too stiff, Fluff," he said. "You've got to drop down in a heap, like this."

He took her place on the step and illustrated the movement. She tried several times before he was quite satisfied.

"All right!" he said, and backed out of the scene. The crank started up once more.

Then ensues the usual "business" of handcuffing the prisoner and taking him away. Dawn-Flower gazes, seemingly unmoved, at the proceedings. Big Dick sees her and realizes that she has betrayed him. As he passes her he makes a savage movement toward her, but is restrained by the guard.

The Sheriff goes into his office followed by Dawn-Flower. He opens a safe and, taking out a roll of bills, counts it into her hand—the reward for the capture of the robber. She receives it with averted eyes and hanging head and goes slowly out of the office.

The Sheriff goes out to the step with her and shakes hands with her, thanking her for her assistance. He watches her as she moves down the road, then turns and tears down the placard outside the door.

Dawn-Flower steals into the woods and throws herself prone upon the earth, weeping bitterly.

The movie play is over.

"ALL right!" bawled the Director. The operator stopped turning the crank and began to pack up. The actors went into the dressing-rooms and emerged looking like themselves again.

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The auto-busses put on power and moved into the road. The company piled in and started off, joyous at the idea of supper after a hard day's work.

Fluff, standing beside Miss Demonstrator as she labored with a stubborn crank, looked about her and sighed.

"It's so nice here!" she murmured. "I wish we could stay a little while longer."

Miss Dem straightened up and let the crank have its own way.

"Well," she returned, "why not? The property men won't be going for a bit. We'll wait for them."

She came around as she spoke and climbed into the little machine. Together they sat in the runabout as it stood in the field, with the long shadows creeping toward it from the edges of the woods. The property men ran hither and yon. The horsemen lingered in the cool air, smoking while their mounts grazed around them.

Through the trees the setting sun showed, a crimson ball in a soft gray mist. The cooling fields sent up ravishing odors of sweet grass and fragrant earth. The scent of wild roses diffused itself about them in waves of perfume. After the hot city, with its scorching pavements and baking interiors, it was a paradise of refreshment.

A man ran past them, carrying a few last things to load into the wagon.

"Look out, girls!" he cried. "Don't get left!"

"No fear," Miss Dem called back. "We'll be home ahead of you, once we get started!" She stepped lazily out and began to crank up. It took time, but finally the welcome sound purred out on the quiet air, and the old machine vibrated with the fuss. Fluff giggled as Miss Demonstrator climbed in and released the brake.

"This is sure an antique!"

"That's right," Miss Demonstrator agreed. Laughingly she threw in the clutch and started toward the gap in the fence. "Hold on! You're goin' to get a vibratory massage free for nothin' when we strike the humps!"

Fluff shrieked with mirth as they bumped across the field. Finally they reached the road and a smooth footing. The wagon lumbered on a little ahead of them. The horsemen had mounted and were riding out of the field. Miss Demonstrator turned and called over her shoulder to them—

"Watch our stride!"

They laughed, and with a sudden spurt of speed passed the little runabout at a gallop.

"How about it?" the last man shouted cheerfully, leaning out of the saddle as he rode by.

The clatter of the horses' hoofs died away on the road ahead. The rumble of the wheels, temporarily obscured, came into its own again. They jogged on happily, the two in the runabout, stopping behind occasionally to escape the dust of the wagon, while Fluff sang snatches of song.

The flame-colored afterglow in the sky faded to gray. The dusk descended. A frog croaked from a near-by marsh. A damp air breathed from the stretch of woods they passed through.

They reached a fork in the road. Miss Dem prepared to turn to the left, but Fluff cried out—

"The other way, Miss Dem—that's the way the wagon went!"

So, putting her own convictions aside, Miss Demonstrator took the road to the right. They could still hear the rumble of the wagon from somewhere far ahead. They jogged on, chatting of the events of the day, and enjoying the country landscape veiled in the twilight.

The road under wheel began to be sandy—deep, thick, soft sand that made slow going. The sound of the wagon ahead was lost.

"Just wait till we get firmer road," Miss Demonstrator remarked, "and we'll pick up the crowd again."

"We're not very far behind," returned Fluff easily. "I think I caught a glimpse of it 'round that curve." She peered ahead.

But when they rounded the curve there was no sign of the wagon. They went on a little farther, dipping down a hollow into woods dark with the falling night. Fluff snuggled up to Miss Demonstrator.

"Hurry up!" she urged. "This is an awful lonely place."

Miss Demonstrator came to a full stop and looked about her.

"We're on the wrong road," she said decidedly. "We've got to turn and go back."

The road had narrowed to a mere path through the woods. Miss Demonstrator jumped out and walked on a little way to reconnoiter. "Good road a bit ahead," she informed Fluff, coming back. "Hard dirt and room to turn."

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She paused with one foot on the step, listening intently.

"What was that?"

Fluff leaned toward her and caught at her hand.

"Oh, it doesn't matter. Let's get out of this!"

Miss Dem smiled indulgently and climbed in. As she reached for the brake a faint sound came to them from the depths of the darkening wood. Miss Demonstrator paused.

"There it is again. It sounds like a baa-lamb."

"Oh, Miss Dem! Please——"

Miss Demonstrator held up a finger.

"Listen! It's—it's a lost kid crying for its ma!" She sprang out of the machine and, parting the bushes at the side of the road, plunged into the gloom of the woods.

Fluff jumped out and ran after her.

"Oh, Miss Dem!" she quavered. "Don't leave me!"

Together they worked their way through a tangle of underbrush toward the sound. It came again and again. And now it was plain to their ears—"Mama! Mama!"

THEY could hardly see, for in the heart of the woods the night had fallen, velvet-black. Miss Dem reached back and, taking hold of Fluff's cold little hand, pulled her along after her.

"Don't get scared," she said. "There's nothin' to get scared about."

Suddenly she came up with a bump against a flat surface, and Fluff in turn bumped into her. Miss Demonstrator burst out laughing.

"I like to bust my proboscis!" she announced, and began to feel around.

"Mama! I want my mama!" The wailing little voice was close beside them.

"All right, honey!" Miss Demonstrator called cheerfully. Her hand fell on a rough latch; they were standing before the door of a shack. It gave to their touch.

"Come on, kidlet!" they both said at once.

The childish voice trembled a little.

"I—I can't. I'm tied."

"I'll get you loose," Miss Dem assured the youngster. She groped her way toward the sound. "Puzzle-picture of a dark hut," she murmured whimsically. "Find the chee-ild!"

Fluff, standing in the doorway, prey to a thousand fears, heard her moving about, muttering anathemas on the luck that had made her "a helpless female anermile, with nothin' but a pair of manicure scissors to cut ropes with."

As she worked she fired questions at the child, as much to win his confidence as for information.

"What's your name, honey?" she asked, sawing at the rope with one blade of the scissors.

"Billy."

"Who tied you?"

"The—the bad men," Billy explained, gulping a little. "Took Billy to—to ride. An' nen—an' nen they tied Billy an' left him all—all alone—at night, too."

"There goes one blade of the snickersnees!" exclaimed Miss Dem disgustedly, hardly listening to what the child was saying.

"An' Billy called, 'Papa!' " the boy went on, his voice faltering with fatigue. "Called, 'Papa!' loud all one night."

"What's that?" Miss Demonstrator pricked up her ears. "You've been here all night, have you?"

"An' nen they hit Billy an' said—an' said, don't to call, 'Papa' again. So," the child continued, a trace of triumph in his voice, "Billy *didn't* call, 'Papa,' but he called, 'mama'—oh, hard and loud. 'Mama! Mama!' " He dropped against Miss Demonstrator's shoulder. "Will you take Billy to mama?"

"Hm-hm!" A new tone came into Miss Dem's voice. "What's all of your name, Billy-boy?"

The child drew a deep, quivering breath. Then, as one reciting an oft-taught lesson, he answered,

"My - name - is - Billy - Brandt - Morrison - 22 - Harlem - Terrace - New - York - City."

Fluff fairly fell into the hut and stood beside Miss Demonstrator.

"Mr. Billy's little boy, that was kidnapped last week!" she cried in amazement.

Miss Demonstrator sawed at the bonds with fury. Together they questioned the boy. The kidnappers had lured Billy away in a buggy by telling him that his father had sent for him. He added, with a gulp of unsatisfied ambition, that they didn't let him pat the horse by and by, as they promised. And this piece of treachery seemed to stick in his little mind more than all his

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past troubles. Ever since, he had been imprisoned in the shack. The ropes were secured so as to give his hands a limited freedom, but he was tied by the legs to a staple in the wall, away from the door.

"Don't they come to see you?" Miss Demonstrator questioned, struck by a sudden unwelcome thought.

"In the dark," Billy returned, leaning against Miss Demonstrator as if he found comfort in the mere contact. "In the dark, the bad men come to leave milk and bread, and to tell Billy not to make a noise or they will cut his head off and he will die dead."

Miss Demonstrator gave vent to an exclamation of dismay.

"If that's so," she commented grimly, "the sooner we make tracks out of this the better!" She gathered up her skirts and pinned them about her waist. "This here is no time for petticoats," she said, and instructed Fluff to do likewise.

She stooped and picked Billy up, and they stepped out of the shack, carefully closing the door behind them.

IT WAS pitch dark. Miss Dem set her back square against the door of the hut, then began to walk straight away from it. "This is the way back," she said in a low tone. But every move brought them into tangled underbrush. It clung to them like arms to hold them back. The stars gleaming above the tree-tops gave a faint light, but not enough to show the path. They could only guess the way.

Finally, after dodging around bushes and ducking under low-hanging boughs, trying to find clear going, Miss Demonstrator stopped short and peered about her.

"Send for the town crier," she remarked. "We're lost."

In spite of the assumed lightness of her tone, there was that in it that revealed her anxiety to the girl who toiled along behind her.

Fluff began to whimper.

"Oh, I'm so tired!" she complained. "And my feet hurt dreadfully. I can't go another step!"

"Cut it!" Miss Demonstrator commanded under her breath.

Fluff dragged herself a few more steps, then burst into tears.

"I've got to rest," she sobbed piteously. "You don't seem to realize——"

Miss Dem took a sudden resolution. She let Billy slide to the ground—he felt like lead in her arms. She leaned against a tree trunk and listened keenly a moment. Then still in the same guarded tone:

"Fluff," she began significantly, "it's you who don't seem to realize. Listen! I told you a little while ago that ther' was nothin' to be scared of. Ther' wasn't. Now there is." She came close to the girl and spoke in her very ear.

"You must get a good scare on—a scare that'll take all the flimflam out of you! The guys that swiped this kid, Fluff—they're not dummies in a dry-goods window. They're desperate men. They want cash, and they don't give a red-hot —— how they get it. Billy is their high trump to win the trick. We've played the joker on 'em. Think they'll stand for it?" She laughed grimly. "Not if the gore of a couple of helpless shemales will give 'em a new deal! Do you get me?"

The girl trembled violently. Her teeth chattered. She clutched at Miss Demonstrator with her two cold hands.

"Oh, do you mean they would—*kill us?*" she quavered in a shuddering whisper. She swayed toward Miss Demonstrator, on the verge of fainting.

"None of that!" the other bade her sharply. "We're in danger of our lives—you've got to help, not hinder. See?" She rose and took Billy pickaback, his chubby arms around her neck. "Hang on tight, sonny," she adjured him in a cheerful whisper. And Billy hung.

But Fluff sank down, overcome with terror. Miss Dem muttered a few words under her breath, evidently not intended for publication. She broke off a dry switch, and stooping over the swooning girl dealt her several stinging blows on the face.

"If you faint," she hissed between her clenched teeth, "I won't pick you up. I've no time to fool with idiots. Two of us are going to get out of this if I can work it. Take your pick—go or stay behind!" She turned and began to push her way through the tangle of branches, with a stony indifference to the fainting girl.

Hardly had she taken a dozen steps when Fluff arose and plunged giddily after her.

"Oh, wait!" she called softly, with a new and desperate tone in her voice that made Miss Demonstrator turn her head and say commendingly, "That's right, girlie; I knew you'd brace up!"

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They battled their way through the darkness, but never came within sight of the road. Fluff cried softly as she went, but there was no further complaint from her. She was trying to help. She even offered to take Billy for a while. But Miss Demonstrator refused to let her burden herself, seeing the girl had trouble to keep on her bruised feet and match Miss Dem's own stride.

Fluff's hair caught on a branch. She called out softly to her companion. Miss Demonstrator came back, and putting Billy down disentangled the silken locks. As they stood, something crashed faintly through the underbrush. The noise came toward them, louder every moment.

"Down!" Miss Demonstrator commanded in a whisper. "Down on the ground; lie flat!"

She lay down under a thick bush, holding Billy close to her breast.

"Nice an' quiet, sonny," she said in his ear.

Fluff stretched herself out beside the little demonstrator. It took all her nerve to lie there as the sound came near. She wanted to break cover and run screaming in all directions at once. It spoke well for Miss Dem's influence that, instead, the terrified girl lay rigid, biting her lips and clenching her hands, but absolutely silent.

Miss Demonstrator put out a reassuring hand and patted the girl approvingly.

"Steady!" she counseled under her breath.

The approach seemed deafening to the two women. When the sound was close upon them something dark loomed up beside the bush—a solid something that breathed heavily and fragrantly, that had long ears that wagged grotesquely as it moved.

Miss Demonstrator jumped up with a sigh of relief.

"A mooley calf!"

At sight of her the animal sprang away in alarm.

The encounter carried its own reassurance. Calves were evidently not infrequent visitors to the woods. Therefore any noise they themselves made would probably be put down to that innocent source, if the kidnappers chanced to hear it.

Miss Demonstrator stood a moment after the sound died away, peering anxiously ahead.

"Fluff," she asked, "do you see a thin place in the trees where I'm pointing?"

The girl looked doubtfully ahead.

"No—yes. I think I do."

Miss Demonstrator shifted Billy to the other arm. He had fallen asleep with sheer weariness and hung, a dead weight, on the little demonstrator's shoulder.

"We'll try it," she said resolutely, and forged ahead.

Presently Fluff gave a little scream, instantly repressed. Her feet had stepped into water.

"It's a pond or something," she whispered.

"Hm!" exclaimed Miss Dem. "Do you remember just before we stopped the machine—a bridge over a bit of a stream—a trickle that flowed under the road?"

Fluff tried to think.

"I—I don't know," she returned doubtfully. "Perhaps——"

"We'll take a gamble on it," the other whispered. She shaped her course anew, as near the brook as the undergrowth would permit, stopping now and then to listen to its murmur—to be sure they were following it. One more tangle of close-set young trees; a jungle of tall weeds; and the road stretched before them, dark, shadowed, mysterious, but welcome as the awakening from a feverish nightmare. Miss Demonstrator smiled in the dark at Fluff's sigh of relief—it was so loud and fervent.

A DOZEN TIMES, back there in the woods, feeling already a murderous hand at her throat, the humorous side of the adventure had nevertheless presented itself to the demonstrator. It did seem absurd—the two of them groping their way, skirts pinned up, hair disordered—she carrying a boy as heavy as lead, and Fluff limping after like a lame dog, while they tried in turn every point of the compass.

Whimsical remarks kept springing to her lips, but she suppressed them, fearing to undermine Fluff's heroic mood. Even now she spoke gravely to the girl, not allowing her to rest on the present advantage.

"Not a sound, on your life!" she commanded in a whisper. "Listen! Do you hear anything?"

They stood a moment. The sand was deep in the road. They could not expect to hear the approach of any one except by the voice—certainly not by the footsteps in that soft Jersey sand. A light breeze had arisen. It made all sorts of tiny vague sounds

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around them. They stood no longer, but began cautiously to feel their way down the road in the direction of their machine. They found the bridge over which they had passed just before they decided to turn the runabout, so it could not be far off.

As they went, pausing at every step to listen, there was a slight sound behind them. Something brushed against the bushes—a man's voice, deep and guttural, uttered a single monosyllable. Quickly and silently they crouched in the tall weeds and waited, hardly daring to breathe.

Two men advanced. One talked incessantly in a high-pitched tone—in a language the two women could not understand. The other put in a word or two, deep and grumbling. Their feet struck on the plank of the little bridge with a loud hollow sound.

A new fear struck Miss Demonstrator. If the men should prove to be the kidnappers, what would their discovery of the machine mean to the two women who crouched in flimsy concealment, with the life of a little child in their keeping? She listened painfully, trying to understand what they were saying, and straining her ears for the fatal moment when they should come upon the tell-tale machine.

Her heart throbbed in her throat. Fluff sank, a dead load, against her. For the moment she seemed to have lost consciousness.

On they came, brushing against the very weeds that sheltered the fugitives. But just when Miss Demonstrator was bracing herself for the exclamation of surprise, the hurried conference, the search for the intruders—the two men left the road and plunged into the woods toward the shack.

The place was so lonely that they threw precaution to the winds; and still as they went they talked loudly, crashing through the underbrush as the calf had crashed.

Before their voices had died away Miss Demonstrator staggered to her feet, holding the sleeping child close, and, nudging the half-dazed Fluff, ran down the road, keeping to the side where the going was firmer.

A little farther and the machine appeared —a solid blot in the vague light. Never was sight more welcome!

Miss Demonstrator laid Billy on the seat and started to crank up. But her arms were strained and stiff with the burden they had borne, and would hardly obey her.

"Let me try," Fluff whispered, trembling, her head over one shoulder, dreading to see the two men coming toward them.

Miss Demonstrator gladly assented. They must be off before the men discovered that the boy was gone. As Fluff worked frantically, Miss Demonstrator's eyes sought to pierce the gloom of the woods, and her ears were keenly alert for the first sound of discovery.

For a wonder, the engine was amenable to reasonable effort. The welcome vibration began to shake the little machine.

"Quick!" Miss Demonstrator commanded tensely. "In with you!" She ran around and sprang into her seat. Fluff jumped in at the other side. They laid the sleeping boy on the floor crosswise of the conveyance, close to the seat; and, unpinning their skirts, spread them out to hide him.

Then Miss Demonstrator trod the release pedal and threw in the clutch, laying hold on the steering-wheel with fingers that trembled so that she could hardly hold it. The wheels spun round in the slippery sand a moment that seemed an eternity. Then the old-timer began to move as through a deep snowdrift.

At the same moment shouts came from the woods behind them—shouts and raging maledictions, the first words they had understood! The sand slid away from under the wheels—they crawled, crawled, crawled! Miss Demonstrator remembered the firm road she had seen ahead earlier, when they had decided to turn. If they could reach that, and luck stood for them, they had a pretty good show. She put the engine to its uttermost speed, hoping and praying that it might not break under the stress.

The shouts came nearer. Far off up the road, in the faint light of the rising moon, the men appeared, gesticulating and yelling to each other in frenzied abandon. They separated, one going farther up the road, the other coming on a run directly toward them. In the shade of the trees the runabout was as yet unseen, but the sound of the little fire-wagon carried far, laboring like an asthmatic.

Miss Demonstrator leaned toward Fluff and, speaking loudly to be heard above the noise, said:

"Pull yourself together, girl! Here's where we play the game!"

To her surprise and comfort the girl at her side answered firmly:

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"I'm all right, Dem. Don't worry—I've got my second wind!"

In spite of their best efforts, the men gained on them. Miss Demonstrator took the bull by the horns. She threw off the power and, turning around in her seat, waited till the man came within speaking distance.

"My good fellow," she called out cheerfully, "can you tell me the shortest road to Newtown?"

Instead of answering her question, the man increased his speed, bawling excitedly as he came a mixture of English and a foreign tongue.

"My littla boy!" he bellowed. "Where is my littla boy?" He reached the machine and stood by them gesticulating. He made as if to pull Miss Demonstrator from her seat into the road.

She resisted him with all her might.

"Slow—go slow there!" she cried. "What do you want?"

He shook his fist in her face.

"You have stole my littla boy!"

Miss Dem, unable to make herself heard above his noise, shook her head and prepared to move on. The man reached for the steering-wheel and took tight hold of it. Miss Demonstrator dealt him a swift blow on the under side of his wrist, breaking his hold.

"Now," she said calmly, "be reasonable. Do you see any one in this thing except this lady and myself?"

She waved genially toward Fluff, who sat as quietly—as cool, seemingly, as a lettuce in a field. Their calm evidently impressed him. The patronage in Miss Demonstrator's manner abashed him.

He began to bluster, as the losing side is likely to do. "My littla boy——" he repeated over and over, but less savagely. His English speech was limited, but he seemed to understand all that Miss Demonstrator said.

"Go home," advised Miss Demonstrator kindly. "You will find the boy there."

He muttered uneasily, suspicion oozing out of him.

"Stand clear!" she said crisply. "I'm going to start."

He stood aside.

At that moment the other man, hearing the racket, came running up. His feet made no noise in the soft sand. He sprang around to Miss Demonstrator's side like a furtive cat.

"*Car-r-ramba!*" he growled savagely. The other man began to talk excitedly to him. The two women could not understand a word, but from his gestures they made out that the first man believed them innocent outsiders, and was trying to convince his companion.

But the other refused to be convinced. He turned fiercely to them, his foot on the running-board.

"Git out!" he commanded brutally, his hand on the steering-wheel.

Deep under her outer calm Miss Demonstrator shuddered. If they were compelled to get out, thus disclosing the hidden child, that would be the end of everything—of Billy, of Fluff, of herself. A glint of moonlight fell through the trees, dimly showing the man's soft hat set down over a dark blot that was his face in shadow. He was short, but as lithe as a wildcat. His shoulders humped up square, with muscle that showed bulging through his coat. Against him and his villainous companion they would stand no chance.

Her mind worked quickly. That firm stretch of road just ahead—if they could reach it——! The little car at its best could out-distance them if it had a start.

SHE leaned far out toward the man as if to obey. Her hand flashed out of the bosom of her dress; she grasped the broken manicure-scissors firmly and jabbed with all her strength at the hand that held the wheel. At the same time she reached and turned on the power that had not ceased to *chug-chug* beneath them.

The man started back with a cry of alarm. He slipped in the soft sand and fell backward, clutching the bushes. The wheels slid, turned, bit the sand and started. A moment more and Miss Demonstrator felt the first bit of the firm road buck at the front wheels. They were on it! The machine began to gather speed.

The man picked himself up and ran after them, joined by his companion.

"Stop! Stop!" he cried hoarsely.

A broad shaft of moonlight showed him limping.

Miss Demonstrator, sure of her ground, put on the uttermost speed. The headlights were unlighted, which was why the men had not at first discovered their presence in the neighborhood. This made the going risky in the extreme. They bumped

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into ruts and out of them—brushed against the bushes on the sides of the road, and swung into the middle again.

Miss Demonstrator bent over the steering-wheel, straining her eyes for a glimpse of the road ahead as they sped along. They turned a curve with a sickening swerve into the weeds. Ahead lay a straight road, white in the moonlight, with fields on each side. The cries of the men came to a sudden stop. Still Miss Demonstrator kept up the speed, getting all possible out of the chattering engine. Every turn of the wheels took them farther from their pursuers.

Fluff was the first to notice a new sound on the road behind them—horses coming at a gallop, their feet ringing on the hard earth. Two men, evidently in pursuit of them!

"It's all up!" cried Fluff despairingly. "Their horses are too fast for us!"

Miss Demonstrator made no answer. The game was going against them, but she determined to do as much damage as possible before she surrendered. Meanwhile she ran the little spitbox at its best gait. As the men approached they yelled at the occupants of the runabout, but the chatter of the machine drowned their words. The foremost rider flung himself on his horse's neck in a dash of speed.

"Stop! Hold on!" he cried. Gradually he gained on them—the nose of his horse was even with their hind wheel——

"Good Heavens!" he yelled. "How far do we have to chase you to tell you you're on the wrong road!"

Fluff started. It was one of the Morrison men who had ridden for the pictures that afternoon. She stretched out both hands to him as he rode beside them.

"Oh, Bobby!" she gasped, and fell to sobbing softly.

Miss Demonstrator slowed down.

"Hello, Mr. Wild West!" she called out genially. "You've got in at the wrong end of the drammer—missed all the fun!"

Bobby gazed from her to the weeping Fluff in mystification. Another horseman who had accompanied him cantered up and drew rein beside them.

"Where are you two headed for?" he asked a bit testily. "We've been all over creation hunting you up. The boss was afraid something had happened to you."

Quickly the two women explained the situation, and displayed the boy still concealed by their skirts. He shrank away at sight of the men, and caught at Miss Demonstrator's hand. They were amazed. The man whom Fluff called Bobby leaned out of the saddle toward the child.

"Why, Billy," he said, "don't you remember the man that rode you all 'round the studio on a big wheel?"

The boy nodded.

"I want my papa," he said briefly.

"Well," Miss Demonstrator announced, drawing him to her knee, "you're on the right track now to find him, sonny. Just hold your horses a bit longer."

The two men were for going back to the woods to capture the kidnappers, but Miss Demonstrator dissuaded them. "The first thing is to get this youngster home," she said. "He's had about all he can stand."

"That's right," the horsemen agreed.

"Besides that," Miss Demonstrator went on, "we need you to escort us home—we've had enough thrills for one while."

Her counsel prevailed. They finished the trip, escorted by a man riding on each side of the runabout.

They stopped at the little station whence they had set forth so gaily in the morning, and got Mr. Billy Morrison on the wire. It was the most difficult thing in the world to make him understand what had occurred. But when at last they got it into his brain, stupid with anxiety and sleepless nights, that the boy had been found, the receiver fell from his hands and they could hear him sobbing brokenly.

They hired a room at the little hotel and ordered supper sent up for Billy and the two women. It was not expedient to be seen by curious eyes at this juncture. Cool had come with the night, so they borrowed a rug from the hotel-proprietor and wrapped Billy in it. He had come to the end of his strength and slept the sleep of utter exhaustion. He lay in Bobby's arms all the way on the train, not waking when they bundled themselves into a waiting taxi. He hardly stirred till Bobby carried him up the steps of the Morrison mansion and laid him in his father's arms. Thereupon he aroused and snuggled his cheek against his father's shoulder.

"Poor Billy!" said his father with a deep-fetched sigh, and let it go at that.

Of course they all had to come in and tell the father and mother all about it. And though Miss Demonstrator's tale was sprinkled with modest reservations, Fluff took

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good care that her little friend got all the credit that was coming to her.

The mother, a young, slender, fair-haired thing, clasped Miss Demonstrator's hand in both her own.

"How can we ever thank you?" hefaltered.

"Well, here's one way!" the father announced bluntly. He picked up a paper from his desk. "This," he began impressively, tapping it with one finger, on which a monstrous big diamond sparkled, "this is the draft of an ad. that was going to the morning papers all over the country. It offers a reward of five thousand dollars to any one giving information that would lead to the recovery of my son, Billy.

"Thanks to you," he went on, turning to Miss Demonstrator with the most joyful smile that that young woman had ever seen on a countenance, "thanks to you —" he tore the paper across and tossed it into the waste-basket—"it won't be sent." He drew a check-book toward him. "I have great pleasure," he continued formally, as if he were making an after-dinner speech, "in handing you this small token—" he scribbled a moment—"of our united gratitude."

He looked up beaming, blotted what he had written, and reaching over thrust it into Miss Demonstrator's hand. It was a check for ten thousand dollars.

Miss Demonstrator sat considering it, her head on the side like a pert robin eying a fat worm. Then suddenly she looked up, her eyes twinkling through a suspicious mist, her white teeth flashing in a smile.

"I make it a rule," she said slowly, "never to accept cash for a ten-strike. For two reasons. The game is sport enough in itself. With money I'd feel like I was kioodlin' through the hand with the cards stacked. Also—" she winked at the millionaire with the utmost amiability—"I've a horror of dyin' rich; an' how do I know some scadless grafter wouldn't make up to me and marry me for my money?"

She looked around from one to the other as they leaned toward her, listening intently.

"So, with your kind permission, and thankin' you no end for the chanct at a bank-account, I'll just——"

She tore the check across deliberately and laid it in the waste-basket.

"O-o-o-h!" Fluff gasped in horror.

"My eye!" exclaimed Bobby.

"I should worry!" drawled the other horseman disgustedly.

Mr. Billy shrugged his shoulders inscrutably. But he said nothing—only turned once more to his desk and made out three more checks, for five hundred apiece. These he handed to each of the other participants in the adventure that had restored his only son to him.

As they walked to the car Fluff shook Miss Demonstrator's arm exasperatedly.

"You provoking thing! Why did you refuse good money that foolish way? You know you're often up a tree in the Summertime to make expenses."

Miss Demonstrator smiled to herself in the dark.

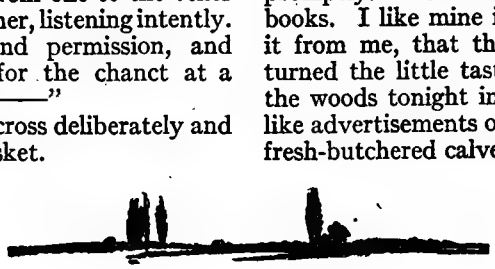
"Well," she began slowly, "we all have a right to be cranks in our own way. Perhaps this is my way. As long as I live I'll have a warm sort of a feelin' whenever I think of Billy's little arms tight 'round my neck. It all comes back fresh to me; the sound of that spitcart bangin' away in the soft road; the foreigners hallooin' behind; the danger; the edge of somethin' you scarcely dare to look square in the face till you have to—— Ah, that's life, if you like!

"And afterward, the sound of that pudgy, every-day man sobbin' his heart out at the end of the wire; Billy's face snuggled into his dad's neck; the look in his mother's eyes when she glimpsed him acrost the room—it put an aeroplane hummin' away inside of me, Fluff! I could have flew over all the sky-dusters in New York. But the cash—that cold cash fell on me like—like a lump of damp putty!"

She laughed softly, and shook herself as if to shed some unpleasing memory.

"But," Fluff said perplexedly, "I don't understand——"

"Don't try!" advised Miss Demonstrator promptly. "Some folks like poetry in books. I like mine in real life. And, take it from me, that there check would have turned the little taste we had of it out in the woods tonight into prose that sounded like advertisements of unbleached muslin or fresh-butchered calves' liver!"



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The One-and-One and—

By
Octavus Roy Cohen

THE tiny, ramshackle theater was crowded to capacity. Through a thick haze of tobacco-smoke the officials on the rickety stage could see an ocean of shirt-sleeved miners and cowmen studded here and there with the conventionally garbed professional men of the little town.

In the center of the stage a rude ring had been constructed, eighteen feet square. The corner-posts were of unsmoothed, slender logs, and the ropes had not been padded. Knockout Connor, professional has-been, grinned evilly from the wings and snarled complainingly about the fixtures.

"These here guys," he informed his commiserating manager, "ain't never seen a reg'lar ring. They don't know how to fix nothin'. Guess I'll hafter put their 'hope' outa business right off. *I* don't wanna get slammed against them raw ropes."

The referee, puffed with importance, clambered into the ring and faced the suddenly silent audience. With great dignity he beckoned to Connor, who, clothed in fighting-costume under a filthy bathrobe, strode across the stage, slipped under the ropes and faced the cheering house. A pause; and then the referee nodded to the other side of the stage.

A huge man, clad in sweater and trunks, stepped to the front. Instantly the audience was in an uproar; and there was an affectionate timbre in the acclaim. It arose to its feet as a man—and howled.

"Oh, you Jim!"

"Kill 'm w'en yuh start!"

"He's easy meat f'r you, Jim!"

"Don't hurt 'im too much!"

The big man smiled indulgently, and, facing Connor, shrugged bashfully.

"'Course I'll try," he said diffidently. "Y'see, these here folks think I'm a world-beater."

"Y'r welcome," rasped Connor. "But y'r gonna be disappointed—see? I'll have yuh in dreamland inside o' two rounds."

"Mebbe," replied Cochran briefly, his famously even temper unruffled. "We'll see."

They took their corners. The referee commanded silence.

"Gen'lem'n!" he yelled. "This here bout is f'r six rounds, an' is between Mr. Knockout Connor—" he designated the brutish professional, and that worthy bowed answer to the salvo of cheers—"an' our local pride, Mr. Jim Cochran——"

He paused smilingly for the outburst which fairly rocked the house.

"This here fight," he went on oracularly, taking advantage of his chance for uninterrupted speech, "is conditional! Mr. Connor is a professional fighter, while this is the first appearance of Mr. Cochran in any ring—although—" he smiled—"some of you boys know blamed well he c'n fight—w'en he's pushed *too* far."

There was a burst of laughter.

"Mr. Connor, bein' a professional, has agreed to knock out Mr. Cochran before the end of the sixth round. Not that I can think he can do it," he trailed off apologetically. "Each man has bet a hundred dollars on the result. If Mr. Cochran is on his feet at the end of th' sixth, he collects. Otherwise it goes to Mr. Connor.

"The men'll fight straight Marquis of Queensberry rules, hitting at all times. This'll let 'em scrap in th' clinches. I'll ask the house to keep order."

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THE men took their corners. Connor, learned in the ways of the prize-ring, hunched his massive shoulders and stared belligerently at the equally large man across the ring. Connor's face was not prepossessing. It was scarred and battered from many hard fights, the nose was flattened, both ears were of the "cauliflower" variety.

Jim Cochran, smiling pleasantly with his friends in the audience, a veritable host, felt the stare of the man across the ring and turned to face him squarely.

"You can't make me mad," he called gently, so that only those in the ring could hear. "Be friendly. We'll fight later."

The referee grinned at one of the towel-boys.

"Jim never gets mad," he said.

Connor's face had flushed a dark red.

"I'll kill 'im," he vouchsafed sourly to his handler. "Th' —— boob thinks he c'n lick me!"

"Time!"

The men advanced to the center, Connor's eyes glittering ominously. They touched gloves over the referee's outstretched hands, and then, as they turned back before the final gong which was to send them at each other, and when Connor was sure that Cochran's eyes were upon him, the professional threw off his bathrobe grandiloquently, disclosing his wealth of knotty muscle.

The audience gasped. But Cochran, already stripped to his fighting trunks, merely grinned.

The gong again. The referee said, "Go!" in a quavery voice.

They dropped into their fighting-postures. Connor crouched, right hand drawn back, perfectly covered. His left was extended slightly. Cochran stiffly covered his body with his right, holding it over the solar plexus in a manner which stamped him the novice, and kept his left rigidly extended. They shuffled closer. . . .

Connor's left flashed out and in again. Once more it shot out and spanked against Cochran's mouth. Then, quick as lightning, his right streaked across and thudded against the jaw of the local pride.

Cochran staggered back dazedly—then he smiled! He shook his head, and when he walked closer his eyes had taken on the light of the battle-lust. Connor, grown careless with contempt for his backwoods antagonist, lowered his guard and shot home a right and left for the jaw. Cochran, apparently unhurt, though bleeding slightly from the mouth, sidled close.

Connor padded two or three short-range jolts to Cochran's midriff—and left himself open. Instinctively, like the darting stroke of an infuriated rattler, Cochran's left plowed into the stomach of the professional fighter.

Instantly Connor's guard dropped in protection of the vulnerable spot, and at that moment Cochran's right, crooked at the elbow, and having behind it over two hundred pounds of iron sinew, thudded crushingly against the other's jaw. It was a unique and perfect double shift and Connor dropped like a log.

FOR hours after Connor had been counted out, and after he had come to and sworn that it was an accident, the enthusiastic friends of the victor celebrated and told each other that they had discovered a new world's champion. There was a return fight within the week, and this time the professional was knocked cold with the same peculiar left-to-the-stomach-and-right-to-the-jaw shift.

Then, one after the other, the various pugilistic aspirants of the district were taken on, and one after the other they were knocked out—some with ordinary blows, some because they didn't have the stamina to weather the gaff; most of them, however, with the left-and-right shift.

Then came battles with men who were known in Far-Eastern fight-circles, and within a year the string of unbroken victories had been heard of in New York. Big Sam Darrel, manager of various world's champions in other days, came West to meet the prodigy and saw him in action against a third-rater whom he good-humoredly knocked out in the third round. Darrel promptly took Cochran under his wing.

Then came a terrible siege of training which lasted for six months. Darrel, enthusiastic over his "find," established training-quarters outside of Chicago, and lavished attention on Cochran. He selected the best from his stable of aspiring heavyweights, and sent them to do daily battle with the big Westerner; making them use seven-ounce gloves while those which the newcomer used weighed ten ounces. And even then it was not unusual for one of the

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sparring-partners to be carried from the training-ring.

"I'm doing it to season you to punishment," explained Darrel to his big charge. "From all I can gather you've never been battered up in the ring, and unless you train yourself to withstand a grueling fight you'll go down and out the first time you get up against a star."

"No chance," grinned Cochran. "I can stand a sledge-hammer, I think."

"And another thing," persisted the manager earnestly. "You're too blamed good-tempered. Why don't you get mad once in a while? It'd be a great thing. You fight like you were at a pink tea—it's too easy for you. Lord knows what would happen if you ever met your master."

"I'd probably win—or I'd lose. I can't get mad with the man I'm fighting. What's the use? It's a business with me and so I fight my best always. But there's no need making it personal."

And Darrel walked away, nodding.

"Lordy," he mused, "I wonder what he could do if he once *did* get mad!"

Cochran, big, good-natured and serious in his training, and with plenty of common sense in his make-up, went at his training with the same earnestness that characterized his every action in life. He ran miles every day, skipped rope, shadow-boxed, rowed the machine, hammered the light punching-bag and slammed away at the heavy one which is used in developing the punch. From nearly two hundred and thirty-five pounds he reduced to slightly under two hundred and looked lean and fit.

One by one the sparring-partners resigned and others were secured. The old ones went East and West and South, and soon every here and there, appeared stray sporting-notices of Sam Darrel's new find.

Then a big Chicago daily, suffering from a dearth of live sporting-stuff, sent a reporter out to get a line on the new fighter—and an interview was refused. The move was Napoleonic in its subtle strategic influence.

News of the refusal, written in a semi-jocular vein, was put on the Associated Press wires as an item of possible interest to the fans. But the humor of the man who wrote the article was too subtle for the fight-crazy public, and it took Cochran seriously.

A close-mouthed press-agent went to Cochran's old home, the little town where he had made his meteoric début, and wrote for the local correspondent the story of Cochran's first fight. This appeared as a Sunday special in a Denver daily, and was clipped by papers from New York to San Francisco, from Montreal to New Orleans.

A demand for news of the new fighter had been created. Cochran's name was on the lip of every person interested in pugilism. News, news, news! was the cry. Wasn't Darrel the man who had developed Jack McCran into the greatest of middleweight champions; and hadn't he brought Battling McCaffrey from obscurity to the bantam-weight throne? It was seldom that the Big Man of the prize-ring neglected his stable to concentrate on one man, and when he did, reasoned the public, there *must* be something at the bottom of it.

Another Chicago paper secured a college husky on its sporting-staff and promptly detailed him to get a Cochran story as an exclusive Sunday feature. Darrel spotted him as a reporter when he first showed up at the training-camp and applied for a job as sparring-partner. He gave him the job—and handed them both seven-ounce gloves the first time they sparred.

Within two rounds the enterprising newspaper man was carried out of the ring in an unconscious condition, but he recovered sufficiently to catch a suburban trolley for Chicago and to write a Sunday "grind" which set the sporting-world agog.

Cochran was a wonder, he said confidently; a world-beater! Never had there been such a fighter! He had the skill of a Corbett, the punch of a Fitzsimmons, the endurance of a Jeffries (this was imagination—the reporter had not put a glove on Cochran); and, in short, the youngster spilled almost all of the superlatives in the dictionary into his frenzied copy.

"And," he finished the article, "the most remarkable characteristic of this Eighth Wonder is his good humor and light-heartedness. Boyish in appearance despite his leviathan size, he is constantly smiling, and is as friendly with the negro boy who sweeps the gym as he is with his all-powerful manager."

Results came quickly. A wire from New York offered Darrel $500 for a fight between his protégé and Hank Brixley, a top-notch second-rater; a trial horse of the Jim Flynn type. Darrel wired his price—$1,000; and, on a gamble, the promoter accepted. The papers were signed, the date

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set, and the Darrel-Cochran camp transferred to New York.

Then Darrel turned himself loose. The sporting-pages were flooded with news of Cochran, Cochran, Cochran! Several days before the fight the house was sold out, and astute speculators were reaping a harvest. Never since the days of Carl Morris had an unknown fighter received such an ovation.

EXTRA policemen on duty at the Garden on the night of the fight found their hands full. The seats were all taken and the tremendous floor-space jammed. Men fought their way into the galleries and stood packed like sardines. Ushers found themselves useless, and even the special policemen could not stem the human tide which battled for standing-room.

Then the fight. For two rounds Brixley bored in and hammered away at Cochran's face and body. Cochran sparred back rather amateurishly, for, although he had learned many of the fine points of boxing, his greenness had not entirely worn off. Between the second and third rounds, Darrel, sitting in apparent unconcern near Brixley's corner, looked across at his pupil and said quietly, yet loudly enough to be heard by the newspaper men about the ring, "Knock 'im out this round, Jim!"

Some of the blasé reporters laughed, and Brixley scowled. Jim Cochran nodded smilingly and put his hands easily on the ropes, working his fingers more securely into the gloves.

"All right," he called cheerily. "I'll do it."

"W'at th' ——," scowled Brixley's manager.

"Fifty even he'll do it!" snapped Darrel promptly, and the hand-bet was made.

It was the old, old game of getting the other man's goat. Brixley shot out of his corner like a wild man. Cochran slouched coolly to meet him, and they stood toe to toe and slugged.

Then Brixley broke ground for the first time during the fight, and Cochran followed, suddenly more skilful—apparently the veteran.

In a neutral corner Brixley made another stand and sent back punch for punch. Cochran still smiled.

Unobtrusively his left foot slipped forward, and like a streak his left hand swooped down and sank terribly into Brixley's stomach. The big man's grunt of surprise and agony could be heard for twenty feet about the ring. The crowd gasped and started to its feet.

Brixley's guard dropped automatically. Cochran's right, which had started from the waist as the left landed, crossed Brixley's lowered guard to the jaw and the battle was over. The "one-and-one" again.

Then came a wild scramble of bids for Cochran's appearance at the various New York clubs. Darrel, realizing that his man could stand a world of punishment, and would be in comparatively little danger in a ten-round bout, owing to his rapidly increasing cleverness, drilled him in ring-craft against second and third rate fighters. Knockout followed knockout for a year, and the sport-loving public became Cochran-crazy.

Within a year and a half came the big fight at the Vernon arena which ended in the eighth round after a bloody battle which had been all Cochran from the start—and the huge Westerner stood crowned the heavy-weight champion of the world.

There is a halo about the heavyweight championship which is absent from the titles in the other classes. The heavyweight champion stands as the man who can whip any other man in the world. Smaller champions are merely the best men at their weights.

AND there came to Cochran a modest, but powerful, pride of place. His rise had been rapid, and he was not a victim of exaggerated ego; but he knew that he was the best fighter in the world and in that knowledge came supreme content. Never had he met a fit opponent; never had he been given a hard battle; never had he really been forced to take severe punishment. He was king!

He took Darrel's sound business advice and went on the vaudeville stage for six months. His exhibition partners were men famous in pugilistic circles and they really fought each other before the jammed houses which greeted them in the big cities. In the interim a new heavyweight possibility had leaped into the limelight, and Cochran was inveigled into a fight with him.

It was scheduled for twenty rounds and lasted two. The combination one-and-one punch again!

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For two years Cochran added name after name to the list of those whom he had whipped; and never in all his fights was he given a hard battle, nor was he knocked off his feet. Potential defeat was unknown to him.

Then, because it was difficult to find men whose chances were sufficiently good to assure good money crowds, Cochran reëntered vaudeville; but he did not allow himself to grow stale or soft. It was his quiet, smiling boast that he would be ready to face any man in the world for a twenty-round go within a month. And two or three times he did—and always won.

He was phenomenal—a great, good-natured wonder! His fights usually ended with knockouts, and his combination one-and-one punch became a by-word wherever fight-talk was indulged in. Kid McCoy's corkscrew punch, Bob Fitzsimmon's solar-plexus blow, La Blanche's pivot—all faded into insignificance when compared to the one-and-one, as it became popularly known.

Then, when there were no more worlds to conquer, Champion Jim Cochran retired from the ring. With the announcement of his retirement came international laughter.

"That's what they all do!" said the wise ones. "And they all come back the minute a big purse looms up on the horizon. Look at Jeffries and his Reno fiasco——" And so it went.

But when new men developed and big purses were offered for title bouts, Cochran only smiled—and refused. For the first time the sport-writers began to take his retirement seriously.

Tom Lambert, conqueror of many men, claimed the heavyweight championship of the world. Of course, the public smiled—but Lambert persisted. Then Lambert was matched with Bill Sayers, and the bout was billed as a championship match.

Sayers won and claimed the title. The newspapers admitted that he was the best heavyweight in the ring, but——

Sayers immediately challenged Cochran, and Cochran smilingly replied that he had retired from the ring; that he hadn't fought in nearly four years, and that Sayers, not he, was the champion. The newspapers all printed his statement, but would not recognize Sayers as the champion when there was in existence a man who they knew could whip Sayers. And Sayers was deprived of thousands of dollars in purses thereby.

Sayers really was a magnificent fighter. Man after man climbed to his height and was whipped handily. Some of them went the limit and lost on points, thoroughly beaten men; others didn't last five rounds. The new claimant was of the school which combines rugged brutishness and mental cleverness. An ideal champion, but——

Cochran was the fly in the ointment. Never had there been a title-holder so popular; never one so absolutely competent. Then Sayers' comments grew acrid and nasty, as the sport-writers stated the case.

He accused the retired champion of cowardice. He alleged, and with absolute truth, that Cochran's retirement before being whipped deprived him of recognition as champion; but he went further and stated that he could whip Cochran with one hand tied behind his back, which was certainly not true.

At first Cochran smiled the same even-tempered, imperturbable smile. Then the smile grew less broad.

Sayers asserted that Cochran was not a sportsman, and Cochran knew that he was. If a champion wished to retire, he argued, why not let him retire in peace? Why force him back into the ring?

He was visited by a bevy of reporters. Did he think he could whip Sayers? Yes, he thought he could. Then why didn't he fight him? Because he had retired from the ring. Was it a matter of the size of the purse? No; he had been offered $50,000 for his share, win, lose or draw, and that was surely enough, but he would not fight.

Constant dripping will wear away a stone, and Cochran was by no means a stone. The public screamed for a match and Sayers daily craved the pleasure of whipping the old champion. He used the epithet "coward" once a day in the public prints; but that had little to do with Cochran's ultimate decision.

Sayers was twenty-six years of age; Cochran thirty-one. Sayers stripped to two hundred and twenty-eight pounds in trim; Cochran to two hundred and six. Both men were clever; both could stand and deliver punishment. Neither had ever met a man who had forced extension to the limit of effort.

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COCHRAN suddenly underwent a revulsion of feeling and announced that he would fight Sayers! The sporting-world went crazy. At last the unpopular Sayers was doomed to defeat and his incessant clamor of "champion" would be stilled. But what a fight it would be! Of course, Cochran had been out of the ring for over four years—but he was Cochran; and that covered all things.

Cochran anticipated a hard fight. It wouldn't have been easy at any time against a man of Sayers' caliber; but especially would it be hard after a retirement of more than four years, during which time he had stopped practically all of his training—for Cochran had conscientiously meant to retire. It all rested on the one-and-one punch!

Cochran trained as he had never trained before. From dawn he worked on the road and in the big gym, and every day he boxed long distances with his sparring-partners. He seemed to have retained his old vitality, yet the eyes of Big Sam Darrel were clouded occasionally; there seemed something lacking in the old champion, an intangible something which could not be accounted for on an inventory, and for which there was no name.

Of course, thirty-one isn't old, even for a fighter. As proof of this Darrel called the attention of the cormorantic newspaper men to Fitzsimmons, Langford, Johnson, Jeannette, Sullivan and a score of others—all fighting their best at upward of thirty. They went away satisfied, for they did not know Cochran intimately, and they could not see the vague lack which worried the genial manager.

Cochran was confident—almost arrogantly so. He had never known the sting of defeat and could not understand that there might be such a thing for him. Even ridicule had never penetrated his prideful poise sufficiently to arouse his temper; and he had won all of his fights with the calm assuredness of the supreme master.

Of course, he'd have to take a worse grueling than he had ever yet received; but he expected that. He'd whip Sayers, and then he'd really retire for all time. It was his last fight—positively his last appearance, he told the reporters grinningly, and they placed him in the humorous category with Patti.

Sayers was a bit shaky. Cochran was a hard nut to crack, retirement or no retirement. But Sayers was a fighter, and he realized that victory meant everything to him.

It would give him position as recognized champion of the world and would insure financial comfort for the rest of his life. It would be so easy after whipping Cochran; vaudeville—and easy marks.

Cochran ruled a two-to-one favorite, with comparatively little Sayers money in sight. People not versed in pugilism prate of fights when the odds were eight and ten to one. But any one who knows the prize-ring will tell you that two-to-one odds are tremendous.

Even then, before the day of the battle the odds had risen to 7—3 with more Cochran than Sayers money in sight. It looked like a slaughter on paper. "One-and-One" Cochran *couldn't* lose! Once that punch landed. . . .

Sayers trained against the one-and-one punch. Of course he knew that the former champion could knock a man out from almost any angle, but then Sayers was clever. If he didn't drop his guard when that awful left crashed home to his stomach, the right couldn't reach his jaw, and he'd be all right. But his instinct forced him to drop his guard against a stomach-punch, and he took merciless punishment from his sparring-partners in breaking himself of the habit.

He let them pummel him day after day, toughening himself for the battle; working, working, working, faithfully, conscientiously.

Railroads made up special trains; syndicates secured staffs of writers, telegraphers and photographers for the fight. The moving-picture offers were tremendous, despite the interstate law. The pictures would make a fortune in Europe.

It all lay in the efficiency of the one-and-one punch. Cochran felt that it would be an even break *without* that. With it—well, he knew that no living man could stand against that punch, perfectly delivered; and he trained and practised and trained and trained. And he knew that Sayers must be learning a defense.

THE day of the fight was faultless. Since the previous evening a huge crowd had massed in front of the arena-entrances; for the battle was to be fought in the open air in a specially con-

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structed amphitheater, and the first round was billed to start promptly at two o'clock. Twenty-five rounds were scheduled.

At ten o'clock in the morning the gates were thrown open, and a flood of eager humanity streamed into the rough-board place and jammed the seats. By one o'clock ticket-speculators, holding a few choice seats, reaped small fortunes for their carefully conserved wares; and a half hour before the fight the gates were closed and a swarm of late comers, some of them actually holding seat-checks, were turned away.

The ring was in the center of the huge arena, its twenty-four feet of length and twenty-four feet of width showing sinisterly small in the midst of the sea of faces. The day was hot, oppressively so, and there was a constant undulation of straw hats and fans.

In some of the choicer seats sat women; and on high platforms at one side of the ring were the moving-picture machines, their self-important operators somewhat nervous at the magnitude and importance of the task before them.

On all four sides of the ring, rows deep, sat the corps of special correspondents, telegraph-operators, newspaper photographers. Several wide-eyed messengers sat near, ready for duty in the event that anything went wrong with the newly connected ringside wires.

Above the steady, droning hum of conversation could be heard the shrill cries of boys vending cigars, cigarettes, candy and mineral waters; others sold biographies of the fighters in gaudy pamphlets decorated with colored pictures of both men. And Cochran still ruled a 7—3 favorite in the betting.

UNDER the stands on the north side, Cochran sat with Big Sam Darrel and his retinue of seconds, smiling, confident, eager. He felt that he was Sayers' master—that he was any man's master—and as a result of his siege of rigorous training, the effect of the years of absence from the ring, and the accumulated stiffness of joint, appeared to have dropped from him magically.

His eye was clear and steady, his muscles hard, his poise as perfect as it had been in his first days as champion of the world when he had been taking on "soft ones."

"Feeling all right?" questioned Darrel for the thousandth time.

Cochran grinned indulgently.

"Sure. Never in better trim in my life."

"Confident, eh?"

"Certainly am. I'll knock him out inside of ten rounds." The statement was calm, not boastful.

"Be careful," counseled Darrel. "This here Sayers is the best man you've ever met, bar none; he has a terrific kick—and he's clever. He's apt to batter you up more'n you've ever been before."

"I'm in trim," calmly.

"Yes, but——"

"But what?"

"Well, Jim, it's this. You won't remember that you've been out of the ring for more'n four years, and you *may* have gone stale. Besides, you've never had to take punishment——"

"Aw, cut it, Sam!" Cochran broke in laughingly. "You are like a hen with one chicken. Don't you think I know I'm going to take a beating for a while? I know I won't win as easy as I did when I was fighting before. I know my judgment of distance ain't, can't be, as good as it was; I know I probably can't even stand the lickin' I used to—but gee! Sam, just let me land that one-and-one punch—just once! That's all I ask."

Darrel nodded.

"Yes," speculatively, "if you can get *that* punch across you'll win right there, 'cause, Jim, there ain't a man living who can stand against that." He whistled expressively. "Gad! How that thing does go over—phew!"

"You got it down fine," agreed Cochran soberly. "Maybe on straight scrappin' I wouldn't have no easy time; but I've got something in reserve—an' its the one-an'-one! I know he's been learnin' a defense, but let me land once and miss half the blow, and the next time I get an opening and swing for his middle his guard'll drop in spite of all he can do. I *know!* I know that no man on earth can help from guarding a blow. The better boxer he is, the harder it is for him to do it. His guard drops instinctively——"

Darrel slapped his protégé heartily on the shoulder.

"You'll do! Thank goodness you ain't no fool kid. If you were goin' into that ring expectin' that you were goin' to win without no trouble I'd be scared to death. But if you're ready to fight and give-and-

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take for two or three rounds—and keep your eye peeled for an opening—you'll win!"

From over their heads came a tidal roar of acclamation, which swelled and swelled and died away, and rose again. One of the club officials poked his head in the dressing-room door.

"Sayers is in the ring!" he announced excitedly.

Cochran merely smiled. He arose slowly, placed first one foot and then the other on the chair and saw to it that his shoe-laces were well tied. Then he rubbed each foot in the box of powdered resin and hammered each fist into the palm of the other hand to make sure that the tape bandages were firm.

Following Sam Darrel, and backed by his three trained seconds, he started up the tiny flight of stairs which carried to the main aisle. A candy-vendor saw him and called a tremulous—

"Knock the spots outa him, Jim!"

Cochran beamed.

"C'mere!" he called.

The boy, his heart pounding with the excitement of talking to a champion, approached diffidently, wonderingly. Cochran flexed his right arm until the biceps were like rocks.

"Feel that!" he grinned.

The boy did as bidden.

"My gosh!" he commented in awe.

The procession wound on up the stairs. Cochran had won another friend. Then a keen-eyed man spied the brown bathrobe.

As a man the thousands arose to their feet and howled. They screamed and yelled and shrieked and called like maniacs. Here was their hero; here was the man whom they all loved; here was the greatest fighting-machine the world had ever known! And he was coming back into the ring to satisfy them; to silence this upstart, this Sayers, who had dared claim the heavyweight championship of the world when Jim Cochran, "One-and-One Cochran," still lived.

Bowing and smiling, radiating confidence, delighted as a boy at his greeting, Cochran slipped nimbly through the ropes. Sayers arose sullenly as his rival entered the ring and slouched to meet him. They met in the center, and Cochran gripped Sayers' hand heartily.

"Here we are at last," he said cheerily, and with no sign of rancor. "May the best man win!"

It was a conventional little speech, a mere formality; yet Cochran spoke as if he meant it. He never had carried personalities into the ring. It was not his peace-loving nature. Fighting was a business, and so he fought—but he liked to feel that outside of the ring he could be friendly with his opponent.

Sayers' reply was characteristic; for the man was unreasoningly jealous of the reception which had been accorded the old champion.

"He will!" he snapped nastily. "T'll knock yuh out in five rounds—yuh big stiff!"

For a second Cochran's lips compressed slightly; then he smiled again.

"You'll have a chance pretty soon," he said briefly—good-naturedly.

THE preliminaries took the usual long time. The crowd grew impatient. But finally the gloves had been inspected and chosen, the bandages pronounced O. K., and the referee had given detailed instructions to the men and sent them to their corners to await the gong which was to send them at each other—the two most perfect fighting-machines in the world, battling for the physical supremacy of humanity. Then he clutched a megaphone and made the announcement:

"Ladees and gen'lem'n!" he bellowed. "I intr'duce t' you Mr. Jim Cochran, undefeated heavyweight champeen of th' woild"—Sayers bared his teeth in an ugly snarl, and the crowd howled approval—"and Mr. Tom Sayers, claimant f'r that honor. These men will go twenty-five rounds to a decision f'r th' woild's heavyweight champeenship. They will fight straight Marquis of Queensberry rules, wit' one exception—they will fight wit' a clean break, hittin' only as long as one arm is free. Ready, gen'lem'n?"

The fighters, giving their feet last nervous jerks on the resin-covered corners, nodded.

"Time!"

Loud and clear the gong clanged. Hush settled over the huge amphitheater, and the thousands in the crowd, keyed to an unbelievably nervous tension, leaned forward breathlessly, jaws sagging, eyes staring—waiting, watching for that first thundering clash of the giant bodies which would break the awful strain. The audience was more excited than the men in the ring.

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Cochran, Darrel's final words of encouragement in his ears, trod lightly to the center, walking as if on air, fairly choked with suppressed nervous energy. He was eager, the old love of combat virulent in his blood.

Sayers shuffled menacingly forward, his huge muscles writhing ominously. Across the outstretched hands of the referee they touched gloves. Then the third man stepped back—and the fight was on.

INSTANTLY Sayers dropped into his fighting-pose—crouched well over, arms almost parallel, ready for long-range or close fighting. Cochran, still smiling, extended his left, crouched slightly and kept the right well drawn back. In the tense, terrible silence the shuffling, scraping sound of their feet on the canvas floor could be heard at all parts of the arena.

Cochran feinted with his right. Like a flash Sayers stepped close and his left shot out, spanking against the champion's cheek. At the same moment Cochran's left stung Sayers' face. Neither blow hurt; but the ice had been broken and the excessive tension in the audience relaxed somewhat.

Closer they shuffled, and closer, eyes glued to eyes, breathing evenly and regularly, muscles taut—waiting, eagerly—carefully.

Suddenly Sayers closed like a jack-knife and rushed! He came in like a bull—yet cleverly covered withal—arms motionless until within striking-distance, and then his left and his left again flashed out and each time landed thuddingly. In the getaway Cochran stepped aggressively after him and his right crossed to the younger man's jaw, but Jim had been worsted in the mixup.

In Cochran's corner Darrel shook his head uncertainly.

"He's slow," he mumbled, "and Sayers is fast as ——!"

They came close again; and again there was an exchange of punches, Sayers landing two to Cochran's one. The champion retained his confident smile and thundered across the ring after the clever challenger.

Another mixup in a neutral corner, and once again Cochran was worsted. He came warily to the center of the ring, and the red trickled from his nose like a scarlet, sinuous snake.

The fighting had been exceptionally fast and the audience was in an uproar. For the first time it fully sensed the fact that Sayers was not a negligible quantity. Near the ringside a man whose reputation as an expert was known from coast to coast placed a five-hundred-dollar bet on Sayers, and the odds immediately dropped to 5—3.

For the remainder of the round they contented themselves with long-range sparring, interchanging few blows; for Sayers knew that the champion was phenomenally clever and he took no chances. Cochran, still smiling, trotted to his corner; but to Darrel he confided—

"That there guy can hit!"

"Stand off," warned the far-sighted Darrel, "an' wait y'r chance f'r a finisher. You've gotta beat him on cleverness."

The gong again. The men met near the middle of the ring and sparred for a second as they had done at the opening of the fight. Then Sayers tucked his head ominously between his shoulders and started in like a whirlwind. Darrel drew in his breath suckingly, audibly.

"It's comin'!" he muttered.

Like a Nemesis came Sayers, with a rush such as had served to make him the logical claimant for the title. His body quivered under the tension, his hands balled hard and held ready to flash from any angle.

Cochran, a ring-general *par excellence*, was cool. Catlike, he rose to the balls of his feet and shot first his left and then his right with unbelievable rapidity at close quarters, but the blows did not stave off the rush. Then they stood at close quarters, their massive bodies in dangerous proximity.

Like the uncoiling of a snake, Sayers' arm circled down; the right landed harmlessly on Cochran's massive chest, but the left sank into the champion's stomach and he grunted. The smile left his face for the first time. Men in the audience rose to their feet, sensing a crisis.

THEN Sayers fought! It was electrifying! He was all over his man, mouthing vile curses, daring Cochran to stand up and fight. It was gall and wormwood to the champion. Four years before no man would have dared to pursue such tactics.

But in spite of desire, Cochran possessed sufficient ring-craft to refuse to slug with the younger man. He knew that it was

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not the proper thing to do under the circumstances—and he was the Artist of the ring.

There was a whirlwind of arms and gloves, and Cochran tried to step away. Sayers' right crooked upward like a locoed rocket, and Cochran's body was lifted from the floor. The audience in-breathed a spasmodic "A-a-h!" as the champion crashed to the canvas on his haunches.

Pandemonium broke loose. Big betters made a wild scramble to hedge, and, in less time than it takes to tell it, Sayers was an odds-on favorite in the betting.

Darrel, wide-eyed and crazy with apprehension, put his hands on the lower ropes and screamed at the fallen fighter.

"Easy there, Jim!" he yelled. "Take y'r time! Y've got nine seconds!"

For Cochran, the world had collapsed. It wasn't the sting of the blow, it wasn't the agony of his jaw; it was the humiliation of it. He, Jim Cochran, had been knocked down! He had been done by as he had done by other men—smilingly, calmly, as a part of the day's work.

It was a new experience and he didn't know how to take the limit of time which the rules allowed. In a sudden fury of shame he leaped to his feet. Like a tiger he rushed into the now confident Sayers—arms flailing, jaw set, eyes flashing.

Here was *fight!* The spectators knew it and climbed to their seats, where they stood watching in dead silence, eyes popping, nails cutting into palms. A small boy in the rear yelled the inevitable "Down in front!" but, contrary to the usual effect of such a cry, it died away and was forgotten.

The thoughts were focused on the men in the ring. Spectators forgot themselves. The insistent clatter of telegraph-instruments at the ringside carried to the uttermost corners of the arena.

Cochran lashed out with his right, and Sayers ducked cleverly, taking the blow glancingly on the top of his shaggy head. Instantly he stepped in and started an avalanche of vicious blows: right—right—left—left—right!

Cochran tried to fight back, but his blows lacked the snap and wonderful speed which had been theirs in the old days, and Sayers stood close, closer—and returned two for one!

Cochran was returning to normal. Sayers raised his guard for an instant, and Cochran, trained to see the smallest opening, slid closer. His left crashed into the other's stomach for the first half of the one-and-one punch. Instantly the champion's right crooked upward to the jaw, flashing hard in the spasmodic, almost mechanical effort to convert defeat into victory. But his glove met a glove and Sayers laughed raspingly from between his teeth.

"Come' gain!" he snarled. "—— yuh!"

The "one-and-one" had been blocked.

RIGHT—left—left—right! The fusillade continued inexorably. Sayers landed a wicked left full in Cochran's face and the blood spurted. Then Jim Cochran, heavyweight champion of the world, for the first time in his career, *covered!*

Sayers stood back, paying no heed to the thousands of maniacs at the ringside who screamed their primitive glee at the sight of blood, at the downfall of reigning power. He uppercut hard, first with one hand and then with the other, in a calm, cool, vicious attempt to break through the cover of the stooping champion. His work was as deliberate and as merciless as that of the vivisectionist.

Darrel almost cried. So this was the end? The second round—and Cochran whipped because the younger man had had the foresight to carry the fight all the way!

Four years before Cochran would have stood toe to toe and slugged, and no mortal man could have beaten him to the punch, or stood the exchange; but now his short, snappy blows had been robbed of their speed, their destructive force. He was too much of a ring-general even to risk a slugging-match.

That was it! Cochran wouldn't even try to fight it out toe to toe. It was Waterloo!

There were no takers on Cochran; nothing but Sayers money was in sight. The handwriting was visible on the wall. "Worse than the Jeffries-Johnson fight," was the spoken verdict of those at the ringside.

But, unlike Jeffries, Cochran retained one punch, which, landed properly, must end the fight. It had never failed; it *couldn't* fail! It was known as the one-and-one!

The round ended and the battered champion zigzagged to his corner. He smiled gamely as he sank into his chair, and nodded weakly to Darrel.

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"How yuh feelin'?" growled Sam affectionately.

"A'right," mumbled the fighter thickly. "Watch f'rtha one-an'-one o' mine, Sam."

Silence. Then Cochran motioned Darrel closer.

"Sam," he whispered with pitiful intensity. "He—he—knocked me down!"

"Sam, d'yuh think it was—an—accident?" asked Darrel.

"Maybe."

"And, Sam—he—laughed at me!"

Darrel hastened to change the subject; it hurt!

"Watch y'r chance, Jim. You ain't licked. Wait f'r an opening, an' then shoot in that one-and-one. Put everything on it, an' y'll kill 'im wit' it! Watch——"

COCHRAN was steadier when he went to the center for the third round; his eyes were clearer. Sayers, suddenly cautious, watched craftily. The crowd was silent.

Then Sayers stepped in and they mixed furiously. Once again Cochran broke ground and the blood-trickle reappeared. And Sayers laughed.

"W'y don't yuh stand up an' fight?" he taunted.

Cochran felt a sudden contraction of the heart; he experienced an insane, wild desire to tear into this man and batter him to pieces. Here was the man who was making him ridiculous; here was the man who was initiating him to the sting of defeat. Here was the man who robbed him of his pride, his all! By dint of the greatest effort he fought down his desire to slug.

He set his jaw; his eyes were level and steady; and he watched calmly and coolly. And Sayers, seeing only the surface, knew nothing of the turmoil raging in the heart of the old champion; knew nothing of the fire smoldering there. The crowd had no pity. It saw in him a beaten man, a discredited champion; another victim of Nature's omnipotence.

They sparred. Less than a minute of the round had passed. Sayers stepped in viciously and his right crossed like a thunderbolt. Cochran ducked and Sayers was left uncovered and off his balance.

Darrel leaped to his feet in a frenzy, and his voice rang out like a clarion.

"Now!" he screamed. "F'r —— sake —*now!*"

But even before his words had swirled across the ring to the giant fighters Cochran had stepped in, the faintest suspicion of the old conqueror's smile on his battered face. Here was the opening he had looked for, prayed for and almost despaired of. Here was the chance for the one-and-one!

He was almost automatic in his calm. His left foot slid unobtrusively forward and his left arm hooked downward like a flesh-and-blood meteor! Deep it sank into the stomach of the seemingly victorious fighter. Sayers grunted with the agony of it and tried to jump back, but his legs were momentarily powerless. And in spite of his special training against that blow, he did precisely what he should not have done. He lowered his left arm to cover the quivering muscles of his solar plexus!

Cochran almost grinned in the infinitesimal fraction of a second which separated the two blows of his famous punch. With more than two hundred pounds of desperate, calculating muscle behind it, the right hooked over for the knockout blow! It landed!

Darrel screamed with joy. It was the one-and-one, perfectly delivered! Cochran stepped back. Slowly Sayers leaned against the ropes and slid peacefully to the floor, his eyes glazing.

The referee leaped across the ring, and his hand rose and fell like the pendulum of a clock.

"One—two—three——"

The spectators were too thrilled to do aught save watch. The prostrate fighter groaned and clutched at the lowest rope.

"Four—five—six——"

One knee was up now, and Cochran clenched his fists tightly within the gloves again. Some one in the audience said "O-o-h!" hysterically.

"Seven—eight——"

Sayers staggered to his feet!

"——!" muttered Darrel. "Th' one-and-one—an' it didn't knock 'im out!"

Cochran rushed viciously; but Sayers, dazed as he was, slipped within the champion's guard without taking a blow, and hung on like a leech. The referee tried to part the men, and succeeded, only to have Sayers fall into another clinch. Sayers, too, knew the tricks of the ring. And then the gong sounded! The round was over!

But Cochran did not have the necessary vitality in the fourth round which passed

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with scarcely half a dozen blows having been landed.

THE beginning of the fifth found Sayers himself again; and he essayed a little mixing. His right hooked to the side of Cochran's head, momentarily dazing the champion, and Sayers uppercut to the jaw. Cochran staggered back weakly and took a pile-driving blow on the chest—a blow which must have finished him had it landed on a vulnerable point.

The round ended with Sayers' lead greater than ever and Cochran visibly weaker. The boom in the betting which had come when the one-and-one landed had subsided and Cochran money was again invisible.

"Don't take no chances," warned Darrel between rounds. "He's too strong for you on mixing. Wait for another opening. And watch that right. Remember he knocked you down."

Cochran suddenly blazed.

"——" he started; then suddenly subsided, as if controlling himself with an effort.

"You mean——"

"Never mind what I mean. I ain't licked. No man c'n lick me! My punch—" his face clouded—"ain't what it used to be."

Sayers, fully recovered, was talking in a loud voice with some newspaper men near the ringside.

"That old has-been!" he rumbled. "Didn't I say before that I could lick him? Why, he ain't got a thing. Lookit how easy I knocked him down."

Knocked him down! Was that all any one could think of? An ordinary fighter would not have felt the disgrace of it; but to Cochran the knowledge that he had been knocked off his feet after his wonderful ring record, rankled—it made a sore. . . .

Cochran was writhing under the mental lashing, and Darrel murmured a soothing, "Don't pay any attention to that guy."

They met for the sixth round. As they stepped in, Cochran's left shot into Sayers' stomach. The other man grunted.

"Say, Mr. Ref'ree," he said, loudly enough for those about the ring to hear, "this here hunk o' cheese is fightin' foul. It's the third time he's hit me b'low th' belt!"

Cochran went suddenly white.

"Y'r a dirty liar!" he hissed.

Sayers sneered.

"Gotta fight foul w'en y'r licked, eh?"

Sayers assumed a contemptuous attitude. Cochran's right flashed out, but Sayers took the blow on his glove and countered stingingly. Then Sayers stood off and jabbed. Cochran bored in, and each attack was met with a jab. They weren't very hard jabs, but they hurt; and the sense of helplessness stung the old champion more than did the blows.

"Ain't it a cinch?" questioned Sayers of the men at the ringside. "See here!" And he jabbed with his left once more, and crossed his right to the stomach in a flash.

Cochran's anger, a new thing with him, was boiling slowly. He could have taken a beating like any other man; taken it gamely, and gone down fighting according to the rules of the game as he had learned them. But this taunting devil in front of him; this confident, infuriating Thing!

Cochran knew that he was being whipped; but he was feeling the injustice of Sayers' attitude—the Sayers who was not content to rob him of his title and his fame, but who must also rob him of his pride.

But he was sane; and he fought carefully. Realizing that his only chance lay in a lucky opening, he backed away, inviting Sayers on; refusing to mix things.

Sayers stopped for a second and plunged a hard right into Cochran's stomach. Cochran wabbled weakly, and clinched! Sayers pushed him off, followed, and jabbed. The spectators laughed. Cochran went white again; his body quivered suddenly—then he was calm again. Sayers came in and Cochran clinched desperately.

"He's quittin'!" sneered Sayers loudly, and the spectators laughed again.

But Darrel understood.

"He's all in," he admitted. "That last blow to the plexus finished him."

The seventh round was a repetition of the sixth. Sayers pursued the same careful tactics even when it seemed that he could have dropped the champion with a punch. And again Darrel understood why he didn't.

"He doesn't seem to know that he's got Jim," he confided to another of Cochran's dejected seconds. "An' he's afraid Cochran's stallin'—an' he won't take a chanct!"

Sayers continued to tantalize, to taunt, to gibe. Cochran kept standing off, fighting to regain his strength and to control that desire to fly at the throat of this man who mocked him—him, the great Cochran!

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He felt that he would almost be willing to take a beating just to stand close and go down giving blow for blow.

He staggered to his stool at the end of the round in a battered condition. One eye was closed tight and the other was swelling rapidly. His nose was bleeding; his lips were smashed. He spoke once to Darrel—

"He—he's laughin' at me," he said.

COCHRAN was barely able to stagger to the center at the beginning of the eighth round. Keenly he felt his loss of prestige; and more keenly the common-sense views which demanded that he take no chances. Sayers feinted with his left, stepped in and hooked his right for the jaw. It landed, and Cochran went down in a heap. Darrel seized a sponge, and hesitated. . . .

Cochran rolled over and climbed tortuously to his feet. Sayers stepped in again, and again Cochran went down. Sayers was laughing openly now—the sinister laugh of the unsportsmanlike victor.

Contempt for his opponent was writ large on his face. And for the rest of the round Cochran hung on; clinching—hanging on; barely able to avoid a knock-out.

He sank back onto his seat at the end of the round. His mind tried to cope with the meaning of "defeat." He couldn't understand. Then Darrel awakened him.

"Shall I throw up the sponge?" he asked.

"Sponge!" Cochran sat erect, suddenly alive again. "Good God——"

He took a long pull from the water-bottle. "The sponge——"

"Got enough?" called Sayers tauntingly.

The gong!

They met in the center of the ring again, and Sayers slashed out with his left. The blow landed and Cochran wabbled.

"Cinch!" commented Sayers — and he laughed again.

Something seemed to snap inside of Cochran—a something which his alert brain had held in check for rounds. He forgot that he was a fighting-machine from whom taunts should drop unobserved; forgot that he'd be knocked out if he tried to fight back. He forgot everything save that he was a man, and, for the first time in his life, he let his temper overmaster him.

He seemed imbued with new strength—the strength of desperation, of maddened spirits, of hurt pride. The dazed spectators saw him leap out of the clinch and then in again. They saw a reincarnation of the old Jim Cochran, the proud, unbeatable champion. But he was a champion whose face was metamorphosed with a passion new to it.

They saw a veritable demon of wrath flash close to the bewildered Sayers, the Sayers who fought by rules, and who therefore could not expect Cochran to mix with him—and they heard Jim Cochran, the quiet, easy-going, even-tempered Jim Cochran, mouthing curses of blind, terrible anger. Cochran forgot his skill, his experience, in his new, ungovernable rage. He forgot that he was fighting in a ring. He hit out with both hands, blindly, unskilfully. His right smacked against Sayers' mouth and split it; his left dazingly cut Sayers' ear.

The challenger tried to step in close, but Cochran would not clinch. As Sayers' arms closed about him he writhed loose with almost superhuman strength and he came in again, slamming, banging—fighting in the primitive way.

"——!" gasped Darrel in wonder. He was seeing a miracle.

"Stan' up an' fight!" grated Cochran from between split lips. "—— yuh—stan' up an' fight—fight—stan' up an' fight——"

The champion's anger was cataclysmic. Sayers tried to stand up and fight, but he was almost paralyzed with surprise—with a sudden fear. Cochran's right caught him crushingly in the short ribs and his guard lowered. His guard was lowered! Darrel saw!

"One-and-one!" he bellowed.

The magic words penetrated the shell of the demented champion. "One-and-one!" His actions were automatic. Those words started certain muscles working. . . .

Cochran did not reason. His actions were purely reflex. One-and-one meant——

His left sank in and in to Sayers' stomach; and the younger man crumpled slightly. Cochran's right catapulted to the jaw! Sayers dropped! And then — the referee almost had to fight the victorious champion to keep him off the prostrate form of the unconscious Sayers. Darrel and the other seconds dragged him to his corner.

Then Cochran relaxed. Slowly big tears welled from the blackened eyes. He looked pitifully at Darrel.

"I got mad," he said simply. And then —"What happened after that?"

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Arsène Lupin-And the Tiger's Teeth

By

Maurice Leblanc

SYNOPSIS—*Cosmo Mornington*, dead in Paris, has willed 100,000,000 francs to any French cousin or cousin's child in the order of kinship. If none be found within three months, the bequest goes to *Don Luis Perenna*, a Spanish-Peruvian, late of the French Foreign Legion serving in Morocco. Perenna is to hunt up the heirs himself. It is generally understood that Perenna is *Arsène Lupin*, but no action can be taken against him for his former misdeeds, owing to the fact that he has tricked the authorities into officially pronouncing Lupin dead. Perenna proves that Mornington was poisoned; that *Police Inspector Vérot*, who had solved the mystery surrounding Mornington's death, was poisoned and a blank sheet of paper substituted for his report; that *Hippolyte Fauville* and his son *Edmond*, Mornington's next of kin, were poisoned; that Edmond's stepmother was Hippolyte's cousin as well as his wife, and is now in line for the millions. Many circumstances point to *Mme. Fauville's* guilt, an important one being this: Vérot left a tooth-marked bit of chocolate as evidence; an apple with the same tooth-marks is found in Fauville's garden; and Madame Fauville's teeth register identically the same marks. "The Tiger's Teeth!" She is accordingly arrested.

But further investigation convinces Perenna that the real culprit is one *Gaston Sauverand*, another cousin, who, in order to inherit the fortune alone, is apparently trying to bring about Mme. Fauville's execution for murders which he himself committed. Sauverand escapes arrest, after killing a police officer, and is hidden in Perenna's own house by *Florence Levasseur*, who is Perenna's secretary and housekeeper, and with whom Perenna has fallen in love. Perenna has summoned Mlle. Levasseur to his private boudoir to accuse her; he is astounded to see Sauverand there. Sauverand proceeds to explain.

CHAPTER XII

GASTON SAUVERAND EXPLAINS

SAUVERAND without further parley, plunged into the explanation which he hoped would clear him of all guilt in Perenna's eyes.

"I never met Hippolyte and Marie Fauville, though I used to correspond with them—you will remember that we were all cousins—until five years ago, when chance brought us together at Palmero. They were passing the Winter there while their new house on the Boulevard Suchet was being built.

"We spent five months at Palmero, seeing one another daily. Hippolyte and Marie were not on the best of terms. One evening after they had been quarreling more violently than usual I found her crying. Her tears upset me and I could not longer conceal my secret. I had loved Marie from the first moment when we met. I was to love her always and to love her more and more."

"You lie!" cried Don Luis, losing his self-restraint. "I saw Mlle. Levasseur in your arms yesterday in the train that brought you back from Alençon——"

Gaston Sauverand looked at Florence. She sat silent, with her hands to her face and her elbows on her knees. Without replying to Don Luis' exclamation, he went on:

"Marie also loved me. She admitted it, but made me swear that I would never try to obtain from her more than the purest friendship would allow. I kept my oath. We enjoyed a few weeks of incomparable happiness. Hippolyte Fauville, who had become enamored of a music-hall singer, was often away.

"I took a good deal of trouble with the physical training of the little boy Edmond, whose health was not what it should be. And we also had with us, between us, the best of friends, the most devoted and affectionate counselor, one who stanched our wounds, kept up our courage, restored our gaiety and bestowed some of her own strength and dignity upon our love. Florence was there."

Don Luis felt his heart beating faster. Not that he attached the least credit to Gaston Sauverand's words; but he had

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every hope of arriving, through those words, at the real truth. Perhaps, also, he was unconsciously swayed by the influence of Gaston Sauverand, whose apparent frankness and sincerity of tone caused him a certain surprise.

Sauverand continued:

"Fifteen years before, my elder brother, Raoul Sauverand, had picked up at Buenos Aires, where he had gone to live, a little girl, the orphan daughter of some friends. At his death he entrusted the child, who was then fourteen, to an old nurse who had brought me up and who had accompanied my brother to South America. The old nurse brought the child to me and herself died of an accident a few days after her arrival in France. . . . I took the little girl to Italy to friends, where she worked and studied and became . . . what she is.

"Wishing to live by her own resources, she accepted a position as teacher in a family. Later I recommended her to my Fauville cousins, with whom I found her at Palermo as governess to the boy Edmond and especially as the friend, the dear and devoted friend, of Marie Fauville. . . . She was mine also at that happy time, which was so sunny and all too short. Our happiness, in fact the happiness of all three of us, was to be wrecked in the most sudden and tantalizing fashion.

"Every evening I used to write in a diary the daily life of my love—an uneventful life, without hope or future before it, but eager and radiant. Marie Fauville was extolled in it as a goddess. Kneeling down to write, I sang litanies of her beauty; and I also used to invent, as a poor compensation, wholly imaginary scenes, in which she said all the things which she might have said but did not and promised me all the happiness which we had voluntarily renounced.

"Hippolyte Fauville found the diary . . . His anger was something terrible. His first impulse was to get rid of Marie. But in the face of his wife's attitude, of the proofs of her innocence which she supplied, of her inflexible refusal to consent to a divorce and of her promise never to see me again, he recovered his calmness . . . I left, with death in my soul. Florence left too, dismissed. And never—mark me, never—! since that fatal hour, did I exchange a single word with Marie. But an indestructible love united us, a love which neither absence nor time was to weaken."

He stopped for a moment, as if to read in Don Luis' face the effect produced by his story. Don Luis did not conceal his anxious attention. What astonished him most was Gaston Sauverand's extraordinary calmness, the peaceful expression of his eyes, the quiet ease with which he set forth, without hurrying, almost slowly and so very simply, the story of that family tragedy.

"What an actor!" he thought.

And as he thought it, he remembered that Marie Fauville had given him the same impression. Was he then to hark back to his first conviction and believe Marie guilty, a dissembler like her accomplice, a dissembler like Florence? Or was he to attribute a certain honesty to that man?

He asked—

"And afterward?"

"Afterward I traveled about. I resumed my life of work and pursued my studies wherever I went, in my bedroom at the hotels and in the public laboratories of the big towns."

"And Mme. Fauville?"

"She lived in Paris in her new house. Neither she nor her husband ever referred to the past."

"How do you know? Did she write to you?"

"No. Marie is a woman who does not do her duty by halves; and her sense of duty is strict to excess. She never wrote to me. But Florence, who had accepted a place as secretary and reader to Count Malonyi, your predecessor in this house, used often to receive Marie's visits in her lodge downstairs.

"They did not speak of me once; did you, Florence? Marie would not have allowed it. But all her life and all her soul were nothing but love and passionate memories; isn't that so, Florence?

"At last," he went on slowly, "weary of being so far away from her, I returned to Paris. That was our undoing. . . . It was about a year ago. I took a flat in the Avenue du Roule and went to it in the greatest secrecy, so that Hippolyte Fauville might not know of my return. I was afraid of disturbing Marie's peace of mind. Florence alone knew and came to see me from time to time. I went out little, only after dark and in the most secluded parts of the Bois. But this happened—for our most heroic resolutions sometimes fail us—one Wednesday

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night, at about eleven o'clock, my steps led me to the Boulevard Suchet, without my noticing it, and I went past Marie's house.

"It was a warm and fine night and, as luck would have it, Marie was at her window. She saw me, I was sure of it, and knew me; and my happiness was so great that my legs shook under me as I walked away.

"After that I passed in front of her house every Wednesday evening; and Marie was nearly always there, giving me this unhoped-for and ever new delight, in spite of the fact that her social duties, her quite natural love of amusement and her husband's position obliged her to go out a great deal."

"Quick! Why can't you hurry?" said Don Luis, urged by his longing to know more. "Look sharp and come to the facts. Speak!"

He had become suddenly afraid lest he should not hear the remainder of the explanation; and he suddenly perceived that Gaston Sauverand's words were making their way into his mind as words that were perhaps not untrue. Though he strove to fight against them, they were stronger than his prejudices and triumphed over his arguments.

The fact is that deep down in his soul, tortured with love and jealousy, there was something that disposed him to believe this man, in whom hitherto he had seen only a hated rival and who was so loudly proclaiming, in Florence's very presence, his love for Marie.

"Hurry!" he repeated. "Every minute is precious."

Sauverand shook his head.

"I shall not hurry. All my words were carefully thought out before I decided to speak. Every one of them is essential. Not one of them can be omitted. For you will find the solution of the problem not in facts presented anyhow, separated one from the other, but in the concatenation of the facts and in a story told as faithfully as possible."

"Why? I don't understand."

"Because the truth lies hidden in that story."

"But that truth is your innocence, isn't it?"

"It is Marie's innocence."

"But I don't dispute it!"

"What is the use of that if you can't prove it?"

"Exactly! It's for you to give me proofs."

"I have none."

"What?"

"I tell you, I have no proof of what I am asking you to believe."

"Then I shall not believe it!" cried Don Luis angrily. "No, and again no! Unless you supply me with the most convincing proofs I shall refuse to believe a single word of what you are going to tell me."

"You have believed everything that I have told you so far," Sauverand retorted very simply.

DON LUIS offered no denial. He turned his eyes to Florence Levasseur; and it seemed to him that she was looking at him with less aversion and as if she were wishing with all her might that he should not resist the impressions that were forcing themselves upon him. He muttered—

"Go on with your story."

And there was something really strange about the attitude of those two men, one making his explanation in precise terms and in such a way as to give every word its full value, the other listening attentively and weighing every one of those words; both controlling their excitement; both as calm in appearance as if they were seeking the philosophical solution in a case of conscience. What was going on outside did not matter. What was to happen presently did not count.

Before all, whatever the consequences of their inactivity at this moment when the circle of the police was closing in around them—around Sauverand and Mlle. Levasseur, charged with murder; around Perenna, charged with tampering with evidence which implicated the woman he loved—before all it was necessary that one should speak and the other listen.

"We are coming," said Sauverand in his grave voice, "we are coming to the most important events, to those of which the interpretation, which is new to you but strictly true, will make you believe in our good faith. Ill luck having brought me across Hippolyte Fauville's path in the course of one of my walks in the Bois, I took the precaution of changing my abode and went to live in the little house on the Boulevard Richard-Wallace, where Florence came to see me several times.

"I was even careful to keep her visits a

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secret and moreover to refrain from corresponding with her except through the general delivery. I was therefore quite easy in my mind.

"I worked in perfect solitude and in complete security. I expected nothing. No danger, no possibility of danger, threatened us. And I may say, to use a commonplace but very accurate expression, that what happened came as an absolute bolt from the blue. I heard at the same time, when the Prefect of Police and his men broke into my house and proceeded to arrest me, I heard at the same time and for the first time of the murder of Hippolyte Fauville, the murder of Edmond and the arrest of my adored Marie."

"Impossible!" cried Don Luis in a renewed tone of aggressive wrath. "Impossible! Those facts were a fortnight old. I can not allow that you had not heard of them."

"Through whom?"

"Through the papers," exclaimed Don Luis. "And more certainly still through Mlle. Levasseur."

"Through the papers?" said Sauverand. "I never used to read them. What! Is that incredible? Are we under an obligation, an inevitable necessity, to waste half an hour a day in skimming through the futilities of politics and the piffle of the news columns? Is your imagination incapable of conceiving a man who reads nothing but reviews and scientific publications?

"The fact is rare, I admit," he admitted. "But the rarity of a fact is no proof against it. On the other hand, on the very morning of the crime I had written to Florence saying that I was going away for three weeks and bidding her good-by. I changed my mind at the last moment, but this she did not know; and, thinking that I had gone, not knowing where I was, she was unable to inform me of the crime, of Marie's arrest, or, later, when an accusation was brought against the man with the ebony walking-stick, of the search that was being made for me."

"Exactly!" declared Don Luis. "You can not pretend that the man with the ebony walking-stick, the man who followed Inspector Vérot to the Café du Pont-Neuf and purloined his letter——?"

"I am not the man," Sauverand interrupted.

And, when Don Luis shrugged his shoulders, he insisted in a more forcible tone of voice:

"I am not that man. There is some inexplicable mistake in all this, but I have never set foot in the Café du Pont-Neuf. I swear it. You must accept this statement as positively true. Besides, it agrees entirely with the retired life which I was leading from necessity and from choice. And I repeat, I knew nothing.

"The thunderbolt was unexpected. And it was precisely for this reason, you must understand, that the shock produced in me an equally unexpected reaction, a state of mind diametrically opposed to my real nature, an outburst of my most savage and primitive instincts. Remember, monsieur, that they had laid hands upon what to me was the most sacred thing on earth. Marie was in prison! Marie was accused of committing two murders! . . . I went mad.

"At first controlling myself, playing a part with the Prefect of Police, then overthrowing every obstacle, shooting Chief Inspector Ancenis, shaking off Sergeant Mazeroux, jumping from the window, I had only one thought in my head—that of escape. Once free, I should save Marie. Were there people in my way? So much the worse for them.

"By what right did those people dare to attack the most blameless of women? I killed only one man that day! I would have killed ten! I would have killed twenty! What was Chief Inspector Ancenis' life to me? What cared I for the lives of any of those wretches? They stood between Marie and myself; and Marie was in prison!"

Gaston Sauverand made an effort which contracted every muscle of his face to recover the coolness that was gradually leaving him. He succeeded in doing so, but his voice, nevertheless, remained tremulous and the fever with which he was consumed shook his frame in a manner which he was unable to conceal.

He continued:

"At the corner of the street down which I turned after outdistancing the Prefect's men on the Boulevard Richard-Wallace, Florence saved me just as I believed that all was lost. Florence had known everything for a fortnight past. She learned the news of the double murder from the papers, those papers which she used to read out to you and which you discussed with her. And it was by being with you, by listening to you, that she acquired the opinion which everything that happened tended to

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confirm—the opinion that Marie's enemy, her only enemy, was yourself."

"But why? Why?"

"Because she saw you at work," exclaimed Sauverand, "because it was more to your interest than to that of any one else that first Marie and then I should not come between you and the Mornington inheritance and lastly——"

"What?"

Gaston Sauverand hesitated and then said plainly—

"Lastly because she knew your real name beyond a doubt and because she felt that Arsène Lupin was capable of anything."

They were both silent; and their silence at such a moment was impressive to a degree. Florence remained impassive under Don Luis Perenna's gaze; and he was unable to discern on her sealed face any of the feelings with which she must needs be stirred.

Gaston Sauverand continued:

"It was against Arsène Lupin, therefore, that Florence, Marie's terrified friend, engaged in the struggle. It was to unmask Lupin that she wrote or rather inspired the newspaper article denouncing you. It was Lupin whom she spied upon, day by day, in this house. It was Lupin whom she heard one morning telephoning to Sergeant Mazeroux and rejoicing in my imminent arrest. It was to save me from Lupin that she let down the iron curtain in front of him, at the risk of an accident, and took a taxi to the corner of the Boulevard Richard-Wallace, where she arrived too late to warn me, as the detectives had already entered my house, but in time to screen me from their pursuit. . . .

"Her mistrust and terror-stricken hatred of you were told to me in an instant," Sauverand declared. "During the twenty minutes which we employed in throwing our assailants off the scent, she hurriedly sketched the main lines of the business and described to me in a few words the leading part which you were playing in it; and we then and there prepared a counter-attack upon you, so that you might be suspected of complicity.

"While I was sending a message to the Prefect of Police, telling him that you were in league with the murderers, Florence went home and hid under the cushions of your sofa the end of the stick which I had broken upon my pursuers, and which I had kept in my hand without thinking. There the police found it. It was a damning bit of circumstantial evidence; yet their confidence in you was such that still you went unarrested. This began the fight; and I threw myself into it headlong. . . .

"Monsieur, to understand my actions thoroughly, you must remember that I was a student, a man leading a solitary life, but also an ardent lover. I would have spent all my life in work, asking no more from fate than to see Marie at her window, from time to time at night. But, once she was being persecuted, another man arose within me—a man of action; bungling, certainly, and inexperienced, but a man who was ready to stick at nothing and who, not knowing how to save Marie Fauville, had no other object before him than to do away with that enemy of Marie's to whom he was entitled to ascribe all the misfortunes that had befallen the woman he loved. . . . This started the series of my attempts upon your life. Brought into your house, concealed in Florence's own rooms, I tried—unknown to her; that I swear—to poison you."

He paused for an instant to mark the effect of his words. Then he went on:

"Her reproaches, her abhorrence of such an act, would perhaps have moved me but, I repeat, I was mad, quite mad; and your death seemed to me to imply Marie's safety. And, one morning, on the Boulevard Suchet, where I had followed you, I fired a revolver at you.

"The same evening your motor-car, tampered with by myself—remember, Florence's rooms are close to the garage—carried you, I hoped, to your death, together with Sergeant Mazeroux, your confederate. . . . That time again you escaped my vengeance. But an innocent man, the chauffeur who drove you, paid for you with his life; and Florence's despair was such that I had to yield to her entreaties and lay down my arms.

"I myself, terrified by what I had done, shattered by the remembrance of my two victims, changed my plans and thought only of saving Marie by contriving her escape from prison. . . .

"I am a rich man. I lavished money upon Marie's warders, without, however, revealing my intentions. I entered into relations with the prison tradesmen and the staff of the infirmary. And every day, having procured a card of admission as a

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law-reporter, I went to the law-courts, to the examining magistrates' corridor, where I hoped to meet Marie, to encourage her with a look, a gesture, perhaps to slip a few words of comfort into her hand. . . . "

Sauverand moved closer to Don Luis.

"Her martyrdom continued. You struck her a most terrible blow with that mysterious business of Hippolyte Fauville's letters. What did those letters mean? Where did they come from? Were we not entitled to attribute the whole plot to you, to you who introduced them into the horrible struggle?"

Sauverand paused. Perenna's mind flashed back to the mysterious series of three letters written by Fauville and sent to an addressee whose name had been erased—those devil's letters incriminating Marie and Sauverand in plotting her husband's death, which appeared from nowhere, punctually at ten-day intervals, upon the dead man's library table. . . . Then the scrap of paper which he found in the dummy volume of Shakespeare in Mlle. Levasseur's lodge—that scrap on which were jotted the very dates when the letters were to, and did, appear! . . .

Sauverand resumed speaking.

"Florence watched you, I may say, night and day. We sought for a clue, a glimmer of light in the darkness. . . . Well, yesterday morning Florence saw Sergeant Mazeroux arrive. She could not overhear what he said to you, but she caught the name of a certain Langernault and the name of Damigni, the village where Langernault lived. She remembered that old friend of Hippolyte Fauville's. Were the letters not addressed to him and was it not in search of him that you were going off in the motor with Sergeant Mazeroux? . . .

"Half an hour later we were in the train for Alençon. A carriage took us from the station to just outside Damigni, where we made our inquiries with every possible precaution. On learning what you also must know, that Langernault was dead, we resolved to visit his place, and we had succeeded in effecting an entrance when Florence saw you in the grounds. Wishing at all costs to avoid a meeting between you and myself, she dragged me across the lawn and behind some bushes. You followed us, however; and when a barn appeared in sight she pushed one of the doors, which half opened and let us through. We managed to slip quickly through the lumber in the dark and knocked up against a ladder. This we climbed and reached a loft in which we took shelter. You entered at that moment. . . .

"You know the rest—how you discovered the two hanging skeletons; how your attention was drawn to us by an imprudent movement of Florence; your attack, to which I replied by brandishing the first weapon with which chance provided me; lastly, our flight through the window in the roof, under the fire of your revolver. We were free. But in the evening, in the train, Florence fainted. While bringing her to I perceived that one of your bullets had wounded her in the shoulder. The wound was slight and did not hurt her, but it was enough to increase the extreme tension of her nerves. When you saw us—at Le Mans station wasn't it?—she was asleep, with her head on my shoulder."

DON LUIS had not once interrupted the latter part of this narrative, which was told in a more and more agitated voice and quickened by an accent of profound truth. Thanks to a superhuman effort of attention, he noted Sauverand's least words and actions in his mind. And as these words were uttered and these actions performed, he received the impression of another woman who rose up beside the real Florence—a woman unspotted and innocent of all the shame which he had attributed to her on the strength of events.

Nevertheless, he did not yet give in. How could Florence possibly be innocent? No, no! The evidence of his eyes and the evidence of his reason both rebelled against any such contention.

He would not admit that Florence could suddenly be different from what she really was to him—a crafty, cunning, cruel, bloodthirsty monster. No, no! The man was lying with infernal cleverness. He put things with a skill amounting to genius, until it was no longer possible to differentiate between the false and the true, or to distinguish the light from the darkness.

He was lying! He was lying! And yet how sweet were the lies he told! How beautiful was that imaginary Florence, the Florence compelled by destiny to commit acts which she loathed, but free of all crime, free of remorse, humane and pitiful, with her clear eyes and her snow-white hands! And how good it was to yield to this fantastic dream!

Gaston Sauverand was watching the face

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of his former enemy. Standing close to Don Luis, his features lit up with the expression of feelings and passions which he no longer strove to check, he asked in a low voice—

"You believe me, don't you?"

"No, I don't!" said Perenna, hardening himself to resist the man's influence.

"You must!" cried Sauverand with a fierce outburst of violence. "You must believe in the strength of my love. It is the cause of everything. My hatred for you comes only from my love. Marie is my life. If she were dead there would be nothing for me to do but die. Oh, this morning, when I read in the papers that the poor woman had opened her veins—and through your fault, after Hippolyte's letters accusing her —I did not want to kill you so much as to inflict upon you the most barbarous tortures! My poor Marie, what a martyrdom she must be enduring! . . .

"As you were not back, Florence and I wandered about all morning to have news of her—first around the prison, next at the police office and the law-courts. And it was there, in the magistrates' corridor, that I saw you. At that moment you were mentioning Marie Fauville's name to a number of journalists; and you told them that Marie Fauville was innocent; and you informed them of the evidence which you possessed in Marie's favor! . . .

"My hatred ceased then and there, monsieur. In one second the enemy had become the ally, the master to whom one kneels. So you had had the wonderful courage to repudiate all your work and to devote yourself to Marie's rescue! I ran off, trembling with joy and hope and, as I joined Florence, I shouted, 'Marie is saved! He proclaims her innocent! I must see him and speak to him!' . . .

"We came back here. Florence refused to lay down her arms and begged me not to carry out my plan before your new attitude in the case was confirmed by deeds. I promised everything that she asked. But my mind was made up. And my will was still further strengthened when I had read your declaration in the newspaper. I would place Marie's fate in your hands whatever happened and without an hour's delay. I waited for your return and came up here."

He was no longer the same man who had displayed such coolness at the commencement of the interview. Exhausted by his efforts and by a struggle that had lasted for weeks, costing him so much fruitless energy, he was now trembling; and clinging to Don Luis, with one of his knees on the chair beside which Don Luis was standing, he stammered:

"Save her, I implore you! You have it in your power. Yes, you can do anything! I learned to know you in fighting you. There was more than your genius defending you against me; there is a luck that protects you. You are different from other men. Why, the mere fact of your not killing me at once, though I had pursued you so savagely, the fact of your listening to the inconceivable truth of the innocence of all three of us and accepting it as admissible—surely these constitute an unprecedented miracle.

"While I was waiting for you and preparing to speak to you, I received an intuition of it all!" he exclaimed. "I saw clearly that the man who was proclaiming Marie's innocence with nothing to guide him but his reason—I saw that this man alone could save her and that he would save her. Ah, I beseech you, save her! . . . And save her at once! Otherwise it will be too late.

"In a few days Marie will have ended her life. She can not go on living in prison. You see, she means to die. No obstacle can prevent her. Can any one be prevented from committing suicide? And how horrible if she were to die! . . . Oh, if the law requires a criminal I will confess anything that I am asked to. I will joyfully accept every charge and pay every penalty, provided that Marie is free! Save her! . . . I did not know, I do not yet know, the best thing to be done. . . . Save her from prison and death! Save her, for God's sake, save her!"

Tears flowed down his anguish-stricken face. Florence also was crying, bowed down with sorrow. And Perenna suddenly felt the most terrible dread steal over him.

Although, ever since the beginning of the interview, a fresh conviction had gradually been mastering him, it was only as it were a a glance that he became aware of it. Suddenly he perceived that his belief in Sauverand's words was unrestricted and that Florence was perhaps not the loathsome creature that he had had the right to think, but a woman whose eyes did not lie and whose face and soul were alike beautiful.

Suddenly he learned that the two people before him, as well as that Marie Fauville for love of whom they had fought so

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unskilful a fight, were imprisoned in an iron circle which their efforts would not succeed in breaking. And that circle, traced by an unknown hand, he, Perenna, had drawn tighter around them with the most ruthless determination.

"If only it is not too late!" he muttered.

He staggered under the shock of the sensations and ideas that crowded upon him. Everything clashed in his brain with tragic violence—certainty, joy, dismay, despair, fury. He was struggling in the clutches of the most hideous nightmare; and he already seemed to see a detective's heavy hand descending on Florence's shoulder:

"Come away! Come away!" he cried, starting up in alarm. "It is madness to remain!"

"But the house is surrounded," Sauverand objected.

"And then? Do you think that I will allow for a second . . . ? No, no; come! We must fight side by side. I shall still entertain some doubts, that is certain. You must destroy them; and we will save Mme. Fauville."

"But the detectives around the house?"

"We'll manage them."

"Weber, the deputy chief?"

"He's not here. And as long as he's not here I'll take everything on myself. Come, follow me, but at some little distance. When I give the signal and not till then——"

He drew the bolt and turned the handle of the door. At that moment some one knocked. It was the butler.

"Well?" asked Don Luis. "Why am I disturbed?"

"The deputy chief detective, M. Weber, is here, sir."

CHAPTER XIII

ROUTED

DON LUIS had certainly expected this formidable blow; and yet it appeared to take him unawares and he repeated more than once: "Ah, Weber is here! . . . Weber is here!"

All his buoyancy left him and he felt like a retreating army which, after almost making good its escape, suddenly finds itself brought to a stop by a steep mountain. Weber was there; that is to say, the chief leader of the enemies, the man who would be sure to plan the attack and the resistance in such a manner as to dash Perenna's hopes to the ground. With Weber at the head of the detectives, any attempt to force a way out would have been absurd. . . . .

And Sergeant Mazeroux, Perenna's henchman in the Lupin days—Mazeroux, who still adored his old-time "chief," but who, now that he had reformed, held his duty in even higher regard. . . . In a few moments Weber would find Mazeroux in the lumber-room where Perenna had left him, bound and gagged; that discovery alone would supply Perenna's arch-enemy with excuse enough for——

Abruptly Don Luis broke off his reflections. Turning to the servant he snapped, "Did you let him in?"

"You did not tell me not to, sir."

"Is he alone?"

"No, sir; the deputy chief has six men with him. He has left them in the court-yard."

"And where is he?"

"He asked me to take him to the first floor. He expected to find you in your study, sir."

"Does he know now that I am with Sergeant Mazeroux and Mlle. Levasseur?"

"Yes, sir."

Perenna thought for a moment and then said:

"Tell him that you have not found me and that you are going to look for me in Mlle. Levasseur's rooms. Perhaps he will go with you. All the better if he does."

And he locked the door again.

The struggle through which he had just passed did not show itself on his face; and, now that all was lost; now that he was called upon to act, he recovered that wonderful composure which never abandoned him at decisive moments. He went up to Florence. She was very pale and was silently weeping. He said:

"You must not be frightened, mademoiselle. If you obey me implicitly, you will have nothing to fear."

She did not reply and he saw that she still mistrusted him. And he almost rejoiced at the thought that he would compel her to believe in him.

"Listen to me," he said to Sauverand. "In case I should not succeed after all, there are still several things which you must explain."

"What are they?" asked Sauverand, who had lost none of his coolness.

Then, collecting all his riotous thoughts,

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resolved to omit nothing, but at the same time to speak only what was essential, Don Luis asked, in a calm voice:

"Where were you on the morning before the murder, when a man carrying an ebony walking-stick and answering to your description entered the Café du Pont-Neuf immediately after Inspector Vérot and substituted an envelope containing a blank sheet of paper for that containing his report on the Mornington mystery?"

"At home."

"Are you sure that you did not go out?"

"Absolutely sure. And I am also sure that I have never been to the Café du Pont-Neuf, of which I had never even heard."

"Good! Next question. Why, when you learned all about this business, did you not go to M. Desmalions, the Prefect of Police, or the examining magistrate? It would have been simpler for you to give yourself up and tell the exact truth than to engage in this unequal fight."

"I was thinking of doing so. But I at once realized that the plot hatched against me was so clever that no bare statement of the truth would have been enough to convince the authorities. They would never have believed me. What proof could I supply? None at all . . . whereas, on the other hand, the proofs against us were overwhelming and undeniable. Were not the marks of the teeth evidence of Marie's undoubted guilt? And were not my silence, my flight, the shooting of Chief Inspector Ancenis, so many crimes? No; if I would rescue Marie, I must remain free."

"But she could have spoken herself?"

"And confessed our love? Apart from the fact that her womanly modesty would have prevented her, what good would it have done? On the contrary, it meant lending greater weight to the accusation. That was just what happened when Hippolyte Fauville's letters, appearing one by one, revealed to the police the as yet unknown motives of the crimes imputed to us. We loved each other."

"How do you explain the letters?"

"I can't explain them. We did not know of Fauville's jealousy. He kept it to himself. And then again, why did he suspect us? What can have put it into his head that we meant to kill him? Where did his fears, his nightmares come from? It is a mystery. He wrote that he had letters of ours in his possession: what letters?"

"And the marks of the teeth, those marks which were undoubtedly made by Mme. Fauville?"

"I don't know. It is all incomprehensible."

"You don't know either what she can have done after leaving the opera, between twelve and two in the morning?"

"No. She was evidently lured into a trap. But how and by whom? And why does she not say what she was doing? More mystery."

"You were seen that evening, the evening of the murders, at Auteuil station. What were you doing there?"

"I was going to the Boulevard Suchet and I passed under Marie's windows. Remember that it was a Wednesday. I came back on the following Wednesday and, still knowing nothing of the tragedy or of Marie's arrest, I came back again on the second Wednesday, which was the evening on which you found out where I lived and informed Sergeant Mazeroux against me."

"Another thing. Did you know of the Mornington inheritance?"

"No, nor Florence either; and we have every reason to think that Marie and her husband knew no more about it than we did."

"That barn at Damigni: was it the first time that you had entered it?"

"Yes; and our astonishment at the sight of the two skeletons hanging from the rafters equaled yours."

Don Luis was silent. He cast about for a few seconds longer to see if he had any more questions to ask. Then he said:

"That is all I wanted to know. Are you, on your side, certain that everything that is necessary has been said?"

"Yes."

"This is a serious moment. It is possible that we may not meet again. Now you have not given me a single proof of your statements."

"I have told you the truth. To a man like yourself, the truth is enough. As for me, I am beaten. I give up the struggle, or rather I place myself under your orders. Save Marie."

"I will save the three of you," said Perenna. "The fourth of the mysterious letters is to make its appearance tomorrow: that leaves ample time for us to lay our heads together and study the matter fully. And tomorrow evening I shall go there and,

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with the help of all that you have told me, I shall prove the innocence of you all. The essential thing is to be present at the meeting on the twenty-fifth of May."

"Please think only of Marie. Sacrifice me, if necessary. Sacrifice Florence even. I am speaking in her name as well as my own when I tell you that it is better to desert us than to jeopardize the slightest chance of success."

"I will save the three of you," Perenna repeated.

He pushed the door ajar and, after listening outside, said:

"Don't move. And don't open the door to anybody, on any pretext whatever, before I come to fetch you. I shall not be long."

HE LOCKED the door behind him and went down to the first floor. He did not feel those high spirits which usually cheered him on the eve of his great battles. This time, Florence Levasseur's life and liberty were at stake; and the consequences of a defeat seemed to him worse than death.

Through the window on the landing he saw the detectives guarding the courtyard. He counted six of them. And he also saw the deputy chief at one of the windows of his study, watching the courtyard and keeping in touch with the detectives.

"By Jove," he thought, "he's sticking to his post. It will be a tough job. He suspects something. However, let's make a start!"

He went through the drawing-room and entered his study. Weber saw him. The two enemies were face to face.

There was a few seconds' silence before the duel opened, the duel which was bound to be swift and vigorous, without the least sign of weakness or distraction on either side. It could not last longer than three minutes.

The deputy chief's face bore an expression of mingled joy and anxiety. For the first time he had permission, he had orders to fight that accursed Don Luis against whom he had never yet been able to satisfy his hatred. And his delight was all the greater because he held every trump, whereas Don Luis had put himself in the wrong by defending Florence Levasseur and tampering with the girl's portrait, which the police had found upon Vérot's body and which they had held as evidence. On the other hand, Weber did not forget that Don Luis was identical with Arsène Lupin; and this consideration caused him a certain uneasiness. He was obviously thinking—

"The least blunder, and I'm done for."

He crossed swords, with a jest.

"I see that you were not in Mlle. Levasseur's lodge, as your man pretended."

"My man spoke in accordance with my instructions. I was in my bedroom, upstairs. But I wanted to finish the job before I came down."

"And is it done?"

"It's done. Florence Levasseur and Gaston Sauverand are in my room, gagged and bound. You have only to accept delivery of the goods."

"Gaston Sauverand!" cried Weber. "Then it was he who was seen coming in?"

"Yes. He was simply living with Florence Levasseur."

"Oho!" said the deputy chief in a bantering tone.

"Yes; and when Sergeant Mazeroux brought Florence Levasseur to my room, to question her out of hearing of the servants, Sauverand, foreseeing her arrest, had the audacity to join us. He tried to rescue her from our hands."

"And you checkmated him?"

"Yes."

It was clear that the deputy chief did not believe one word of the story. He knew through M. Desmalions, the Prefect of Police, and Mazeroux that Don Luis was in love with Florence; and Don Luis was not the man even through jealousy to hand over a woman whom he loved. Weber increased his attention.

"Good business!" he said. "Take me up to your room. Was it a hard struggle?"

"Not very. I managed to disarm the scoundrel. All the same, Mazeroux got stabbed in the thumb."

"Nothing serious?"

"Oh dear, no; but he has gone to have his wound dressed at the druggist's."

The deputy chief stopped, greatly surprised.

"What! Isn't Mazeroux in your room with the two prisoners?"

"I never told you that he was."

"No, but your butler——"

"The butler made a mistake. Mazeroux went out a few minutes before you came."

"It's funny," said Weber, watching Don

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Luis closely, "but my men all think he's here. They haven't seen him go out."

"They haven't seen him go out?" echoed Don Luis, pretending to feel anxious. "But then where can he be? He told me he wanted to have his thumb seen to."

The deputy chief was growing more and more suspicious. Evidently Perenna was trying to get rid of him by sending him in search of the sergeant.

"I will send one of my men," he said. "Is the druggist's near?"

"Just around the corner, in the Rue de Bourgogne. Besides, we can telephone."

"Oh, we can telephone!" muttered Weber.

He was quite at a loss and looked like a man who does not know what is going to happen next. He moved slowly toward the instrument, while barring the way to Don Luis to prevent his escaping. Don Luis therefore retreated to the telephone-box, as if forced to do so, took down the receiver with one hand, and, calling, "Hullo! Hullo! Saxe, 2409," with the other hand, which was resting against the wall, he cut one of the wires with a pair of pliers which he had taken off the table as he passed.

"Hullo! Is that 2409? Are you the druggist? . . . Hullo! . . . Sergeant Mazeroux, of the detective service, is with you, isn't he? . . . Eh? What? What do you say? But it's too awful! Are you sure? Do you mean to say the wound is poisoned?"

Without thinking what he was doing, the deputy chief pushed Don Luis aside and took hold of the receiver. The thought of the poisoned wound was too much for him.

"Hello!" he cried, keeping an eye on Don Luis and motioning to the other not to go away. "Hello! Hello! . . . Eh? . . . It's Deputy Chief Weber, of the detective office, speaking. . . . Hello! . . . I want to know about Sergeant Mazeroux. . . . Hello! Hello! . . . Oh, hang it, why don't you answer!——"

Suddenly he let go the instrument, looked at the wires, perceived that they had been cut and turned around, showing a face that clearly expressed the thought in his mind:

"That's done it! I've been tricked!"

Perenna was standing a couple of yards behind Weber, leaning carelessly against the woodwork of the arch, with his left hand passed between his back and the woodwork. He was smiling, smiling pleasantly, kindly and genially.

"Don't move!" he said, with a gesture of his right hand.

Weber, more frightened by that smile than he would have been by threats, took good care not to move.

"Don't move!" repeated Don Luis in a very queer voice. "And, whatever you do, don't be alarmed. You sha'n't be hurt, I promise you. Just five minutes in a dark cell for a naughty little boy. Are you ready? One, two, three! Bang!"

He stood aside and pressed a secret button that worked a hidden iron curtain. The heavy panel came crashing to the floor. The deputy chief was a prisoner.

"That's a hundred millions gone to Jericho!" grinned Don Luis. "A pretty trick, but a bit expensive. Good-by, Mornington inheritance! Good-by, Don Luis Perenna! And now, my dear Lupin, if you don't want Weber to take his revenge, beat a retreat and in good order. One, two; left, right; left, right!"

As he spoke he locked, on the inside, the folding doors between the drawing-room and the first-floor anteroom; then, returning to his study, he locked the door between this room and the drawing-room.

The deputy chief was banging at the iron curtain with all his might and shouting so loudly that they were bound to hear him outside through the open window.

"You're not making half enough noise, deputy!" cried Don Luis. "Let's see what we can do."

He took his revolver and fired off three bullets, one of which broke a pane. Then he quickly left his study by a small, massive door, which he carefully closed behind him. He was now in a secret passage which ran around both rooms and ended at another door leading to the anteroom. He opened this door wide and was thus able to hide behind it.

Attracted by the shots and the noise, the detectives were already rushing through the hall and up the staircase. When they reached the first floor and had gone through the anteroom, as the drawing-room doors were locked, the only outlet open to them was the passage, at the end of which they could hear the deputy shouting. They all six darted down it.

When the last of them had vanished around the bend in the passage, Don Luis softly pushed back the door that concealed him and locked it like the rest. The six

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detectives were as safely imprisoned as the deputy chief.

"Bottled!" muttered Don Luis. "It will take them quite five minutes to realize the situation, to bang at the locked doors and to break down one of them. In five minutes, we shall be far away."

HE MET two of his servants running up with scared faces, the chauffeur and the butler. He flung each of them a thousand-franc note and said to the chauffeur:

"Set the engine going, and let no one near the machine to block my way. Two thousand francs more for each of you if I get off in the motor. Don't stand staring at me like that; I mean what I say. Two thousand francs apiece; it's for you to earn it. Look sharp!"

He himself went up the second flight without undue haste, remaining master of himself. But on the last stair he was seized with such a feeling of elation that he shouted:

"Victory! The road is clear!"

The boudoir door was opposite. He opened it and repeated:

"Victory! But there's not a second to lose. Follow me!"

He entered. A stifled oath escaped his lips.

The room was empty.

"What!" he stammered. "What does this mean? . . . They're gone. . . . Florence——"

Certainly, unlikely though it seemed, he had hitherto supposed that Sauverand possessed a false key to the lock. But how could they both have escaped, in the midst of the detectives? He looked around him. And then he understood.

In the recess containing the window, the lower part of the wall, which formed a very wide box underneath the casement, had the top of its woodwork raised and resting against the panes, exactly like the lid of a chest. And inside the open chest he saw the upper rungs of a narrow descending ladder.

In a second Don Luis conjured up the whole story of the past: the ancestress of Count Malonyi, his predecessor in the house, hiding in the old family mansion, escaping the search of the perquisitors and in this way living throughout the troublous times of the French Revolution. Everything was explained. A passage contrived in the thickness of the wall led to some distant outlet. And this was how Florence used to come and go through the house; this was how Gaston went in and out in all security; and this also was how both of them were able to enter his room and surprise his secrets.

"Why not have told me?" he wondered. "A lingering suspicion, I suppose. . . ."

But his eyes were attracted by a sheet of paper on the table. With a feverish hand, Gaston Sauverand had scribbled the following lines in pencil:

> We are trying to escape so as not to compromise you. If we are caught, it can't be helped. The great thing is that you should be free. All our hopes are centered in you.

Below were two words written by Florence—

> Save Marie.

"Ah!" he murmured, disconcerted by the turn of events and not knowing what to decide. "Why, oh, why did they not obey my instructions? We are separated now——"

Downstairs the detectives were battering at the door of the passage in which they were imprisoned. Perhaps he would still have time to reach his motor before they succeeded in breaking down the door. Nevertheless he preferred to take the same road as Florence and Sauverand, which gave him the hope of saving them and of rescuing them in case of danger.

He therefore stepped over the side of the chest, placed his foot on the top rung and went down. Some twenty bars brought him to the middle of the first floor. Here, by the light of his electric lantern, he entered a sort of low, vaulted tunnel, dug, as he thought, in the wall and so narrow that he could only walk along it sidewise.

Thirty yards farther there was a bend, at right angles; and next, at the end of another tunnel, of the same length, a trap door, which stood open, revealing the rungs of a second ladder. He did not doubt that the fugitives had gone this way.

It was quite light at the bottom. Here he found himself in a cupboard which was also open and which, on ordinary occasions, must have been covered by curtains that were now drawn. This cupboard faced a bed that filled almost the whole space of an alcove. On passing through the alcove and

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reaching a room from which it was separated only by a slender partition, to his great surprise he recognized Florence's sitting-room.

This time he knew where he was. The exit, which was not secret, as it led to the Place du Palais-Bourbon, but nevertheless very safe, was that which Sauverand generally used when Florence admitted him.

Don Luis therefore went through the entrance-hall and down the steps and, a little way before the pantry, came upon the cellar-stairs. He ran down these and soon recognized the low door that served to admit the wine-casks. The daylight filtered in through a small, grated spy-hole. He groped till he found the lock. Glad to have come to the end of his expedition, he opened the door.

"Hang it all!" he growled, leaping back and clutching at the lock, which he managed to fasten again.

Two policemen in uniform were guarding the exit, two policemen who had tried to seize him as he appeared!

Where did those two men come from? Had they prevented the escape of Sauverand and Florence? But in that case Don Luis would have met the two fugitives, as he had come by exactly the same road as they.

"No," he thought, "they effected their flight before the exit was watched. But, by Jove, it's my turn to clear out; and that's not easy. Shall I let myself be caught in my burrow like a rabbit?"

He went up the cellar-stairs again, intending to hasten matters, to slip into the courtyard through the outhouses, to jump into his motor and to clear a way for himself. But when he was just reaching the yard, near the coach house, he saw four detectives, four of those whom he had imprisoned, come up waving their arms and shouting. And he also became aware of a regular uproar near the main gate and the porter's lodge. A number of men were all talking together, raising their voices in violent discussion.

Perhaps he might profit by this opportunity to steal outside under cover of the disorder. At the risk of being seen, he put out his head. And what he saw astounded him.

Gaston Sauverand stood with his back to the wall of the lodge, surrounded by policemen and detectives who pushed and insulted him. The handcuffs were on his wrists.

Gaston Sauverand a prisoner! What had happened between the two fugitives and the police?

His heart wrung with anguish, he leaned out still farther. But he did not see Florence. The girl had no doubt succeeded in escaping.

Weber's appearance on the steps and the deputy chief's first words confirmed his hopes. Weber was mad with rage. His recent captivity and the humiliation of his defeat exasperated him.

"Ah!" he roared, as he saw the prisoner. "There's one of them, at any rate! Gaston Sauverand! Choice game, that! . . . Where did you catch him?"

"On the Place du Palais-Bourbon," said one of the inspectors. "We saw him slinking out through the cellar-door."

"And his accomplice, the Levasseur girl?"

"We missed her, deputy chief. She was the first out."

"And Don Luis? You haven't let him leave the house, I hope? I gave orders."

"He tried to get out through the cellar-door five minutes after."

"Who said so?"

"One of the men in uniform posted outside the door."

"Well?"

"The fellow went back into the cellar."

Weber gave a shout of delight.

"We've got him! And it's a nasty business for him! Charge of resisting the police! . . . Complicity! . . . We shall be able to unmask him at last! . . . Two men to guard Sauverand, four men on the Place du Palais-Bourbon, revolver in hand. Two men on the roof. The rest stick to me. We'll begin with the Levasseur girl's room and we'll take his room next."

Don Luis did not wait for the enemies' attack. Knowing their intentions, he beat a retreat, unseen, toward Florence's rooms. Here, as Weber did not yet know the short cut through the outhouses, he had time to make sure that the trap door was in perfect working order and that there was no reason why they should discover the existence of a secret cupboard at the back of the alcove, behind the curtains of the bed.

Once inside the passage he went up the first staircase, followed the long corridor contrived in the wall, climbed the ladder leading to the boudoir; and, perceiving that this second trap door fitted the woodwork so closely that no one could suspect

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anything, he closed it over him. A few minutes later he heard the noise of men making a search above his head.

And so, on the twenty-fourth of May, at five o'clock in the afternoon, the position was as follows: Florence Levasseur with a warrant out against her, Gaston Sauverand in prison, Marie Fauville in prison and refusing all food. And Don Luis, who believed in their innocence and who alone could have saved them, Don Luis was being blockaded in his own house and hunted down by a score of detectives!

As for the Mornington inheritance, there could be no more question of that, because the legatee, in his turn, had set himself in open rebellion against society.

"Capital!" said Don Luis with a grin. "This is life as I understand it. The question is a simple one and may be put in different ways. How can a wretched, unwashed beggar, with not a penny in his pocket, make a fortune in twenty-four hours without setting foot outside his hovel? How can a general, with no soldiers and no ammunition left, win a battle which he has lost? In short, how shall I, Arsène Lupin, manage to be present tomorrow evening at the meeting which will be held on the Boulevard Suchet and to behave in such a way as to save Marie Fauville, Florence Levasseur, Gaston Sauverand and my excellent friend Don Luis Perenna in the bargain?"

Dull blows came from somewhere. The men must be hunting the roofs and sounding the walls.

Don Luis stretched himself flat on the floor, hid his face in his folded arms and, shutting his eyes, murmured—

"Let's think."

CHAPTER XIV

"HELP!"

WHEN Lupin afterward told me this episode of the tragic story, he said, not without a certain self-complacency:

"What astonished me then and what astonishes me still, as one of the most amazing victories on which I am entitled to pride myself, is that I was able to admit Sauverand and Marie Fauville's innocence on the spot, as a problem solved once and for all. It was a first-class performance, I swear, and surpassed the most famous deductions of the most famous investigators both in psychological value and in detective merit.

"After all, taking everything into account, there was not the shadow of a fresh fact to enable me to alter the verdict. The charges accumulated against the two prisoners were the same and were so grave that no examining magistrate would have hesitated for a second to commit them for trial, nor any jury to bring them in guilty. I will not speak of Marie Fauville: you had only to think of the marks of her teeth to be absolutely certain. But Gaston Sauverand, the son of Victor Sauverand and consequently the heir of Cosmo Mornington; Gaston Sauverand, the man with the ebony walking-stick and the murderer of Chief Inspector Ancenis: was he not just as guilty as Marie Fauville, incriminated with her by the mysterious letters, incriminated by the very revelation of the husband whom they had killed? . . .

"And yet why did that sudden change take place in me?" he asked. "Why did I go against the evidence? Why did I credit an incredible fact? Why did I admit the inadmissible? . . . Why? Well, no doubt, because truth has an accent that rings in the ears in a manner all its own. On the one side, every proof, every fact, every reality, every certainty; on the other, a story, a story told by one of the three criminals, and therefore, presumptively, absurd and untrue from start to finish. But a story told in á frank voice, a clear, dispassionate, closely woven story, free from complications or improbabilities, a story which supplied no positive solution, but which, by its very honesty, obliged any impartial mind to reconsider the solution arrived at. I believed the story."

The explanation which Lupin gave me was not complete. I asked—

"And Florence Levasseur?"

"Florence?"

"Yes; you don't tell me what you thought. What was your opinion about her? Everything tended to incriminate her not only in your eyes, because, logically speaking, she had taken part in all the attempts to murder you, but also in the eyes of the police. They knew that she used to pay Sauverand clandestine visits at his house on the Boulevard Richard-Wallace. They had found her photograph in Inspector Vérot's memorandum-book. And then . . . and then all the rest: your accusations, your certainties. Was all that modified by

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Sauverand's story? To your mind, was Florence innocent or guilty?"

He hesitated, seemed on the point of replying directly and frankly to my question, but could not bring himself to do so and said:

"I wished to have confidence. In order to act, I must have full and entire confidence, whatever doubts might still assail me, whatever darkness might still enshroud this or that part of the adventure. I therefore believed. And, believing, I acted according to my belief."

Acting, to Don Luis Perenna, during those hours of forced inactivity, consisted solely in perpetually repeating to himself Gaston Sauverand's account of the events. He tried to reconstitute it in all its details, to remember the very least sentences, the apparently most insignificant phrases. And he examined those sentences, scrutinized those phrases one by one, in order to extract such particle of the truth as they contained.

For the truth was there. Sauverand had said so and Perenna did not doubt it. The whole sinister affair, all that constituted the case of the Mornington inheritance and the tragedy of the Boulevard Suchet, all that could throw light upon the plot hatched against Marie Fauville, all that could explain the undoing of Sauverand and Florence: all this lay in Sauverand's story. Don Luis had only to understand; and the truth would appear like the moral which we draw from some obscure fable.

Don Luis did not once deviate from his method. If any objection suggested itself to his mind, he at once replied:

"Very well. It may be that I am wrong and that Sauverand's story will not enlighten me on any point capable of guiding me. It may be that the truth lies outside it. But am I in a position to get at the truth in any other way? All that I possess as an instrument of research, without attaching undue importance to certain gleams of light which the regular appearance of the mysterious letters has shed upon the case—all that I possess is Gaston Sauverand's story. Must I not make use of it?"

And once again, as when one follows a path by another person's tracks, he began to live through the adventure which Sauverand had been through. He compared it with the picture of it which he had imagined until then. The two were in opposition; but could not the very clash of their opposition be made to produce a spark of light?

"Here is what he said," he thought, "and there is what I believed. What does the difference mean? Here is the thing that was and there is the thing that appeared to be. Why did the criminal wish the thing that was to appear under that particular aspect? To remove all suspicion from him? But in that case was it necessary that suspicion should fall precisely on those on whom it did?"

The questions came crowding one upon the other. He sometimes answered them at random, mentioning names and uttering words in succession, as if the name mentioned might be just that of the criminal and the words uttered those which contained the unseen reality.

Then at once he would take up the story again, as schoolboys do when parsing and analyzing a passage, in which each expression is carefully sifted, each period discussed, each sentence reduced to its essential value.

HOURS and hours passed. Suddenly, in the middle of the night, he gave a start. He took out his watch. By the light of his electric lamp he saw that it was seventeen minutes to twelve.

"So at seventeen minutes to twelve at night," he said, "I fathomed the mystery."

He tried to control his emotion, but it was too great; and his nerves were so immensely staggered by the trial that he began to shed tears. He had caught sight of the appalling truth, all of a sudden, as when at night one half sees a landscape under a lightning-flash.

There is nothing more unnerving than this sudden illumination when we have been groping and struggling in the dark. Already exhausted by his physical efforts and by the want of food from which he was beginning to suffer, he felt the shock so intensely that, without caring to think a moment longer, he managed to go to sleep, or rather to sink into sleep, as one sinks into the healing waters of a bath.

When he awoke, in the small hours, alert and well despite the discomfort of his couch, he shuddered on thinking of the theory which he had accepted; and his first instinct was to doubt it. He had, so to speak, no time.

All the proofs came rushing to his mind

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of their own accord and at once transformed the theory into one of those certainties which it would be madness to deny. It was that and nothing else. As he had foreseen, the truth lay recorded in Sauverand's story. And he had not been mistaken, either, in saying to Mazeroux that the manner in which the mysterious letters appeared had put him on the track of the truth.

And the truth was terrible. He felt, at the thought of it, the same fears that had maddened Inspector Vérot when, already tortured by the poison, he stammered:

"Oh, I don't like this, I don't like the look of this! . . . The whole thing has been planned in such an infernal manner!"

Infernal was the word! And Don Luis remained stupefied at the revelation of a crime which looked as if no human brain could have conceived it.

For two hours more he devoted all his mental powers to examining the situation from every point of view. He was not much disturbed about the result, because, being now in possession of the terrible secret, he had nothing more to do but make his escape and go that evening to the meeting on the Boulevard Suchet, where he would show them all how the murder was committed.

But when, wishing to try his chance of escaping, he went up through the underground passage and climbed to the top of the upper ladder; that is to say, to the level of the boudoir, he heard through the trap door the voices of men in the room.

"By Jove," he said to himself, "the thing is not so simple as I thought! In order to escape the minions of the law, I must first leave my prison; and here is at least one of the exits blocked. Let's look at the other."

He went down to Florence's apartments and worked the mechanism, which consisted of a counterweight. The panel of the cupboard moved in the groove.

Driven by hunger and hoping to find some provisions which would enable him to withstand a siege without being reduced to famine, he was about to pass through the alcove, behind the curtains, when he was stopped short by a sound of footsteps. Some one had entered the room.

"Well, Mazeroux, have you spent the night here? Nothing new?"

Don Luis recognized the Prefect of Police by his voice; and the question put by the Prefect told him first that Mazeroux had been released from the dark closet where he had bound him up and secondly that the sergeant was in the next room. Fortunately the sliding panel had worked without the least sound; and Don Luis was able to overhear the convesation between the two men.

"No, nothing new, Monsieur le Préfet," replied Mazeroux.

"That's funny. The confounded fellow must be somewhere. Or can he have got away over the roof?"

"Impossible, Monsieur le Préfet," said a third voice, which Don Luis recognized as that of Weber, the deputy chief detective. "Impossible. We made certain yesterday that, unless he has wings——"

"Then what do you think, Weber?"

"I think, Monsieur le Préfet, that he is concealed in the house. This is an old house and probably contains some safe hiding-place——"

"Of course, of course," said M. Desmalions, whom Don Luis, peeping through the curtains, saw walking to and fro in front of the alcove. "You're right; and we shall catch him in his burrow. Only, is it really necessary?"

"Monsieur le Préfet!"

"Well, you know my opinion on the subject, which is also the Prime Minister's opinion. Unearthing Lupin would be a blunder which we should end by regretting. After all, he's become an honest man, you know; he's useful to us and he does no harm——"

"No harm, Monsieur le Préfet? Do you think so?" said Weber stiffly.

M. Desmalions burst out laughing.

"Oh, of course, yesterday's trick, the telephone trick! You must admit it was funny. The Premier had to hold his sides when I told him of it."

"Upon my word, I see nothing to laugh at!"

"No; but, all the same, the rascal is never at a loss. Funny or not, the trick was extraordinarily daring. To cut the telephone-wire before your eyes and then blockade you behind that iron curtain! By the way, Mazeroux, you must get the telephone repaired this morning, so as to keep in touch with the office. Have you begun your search in these two rooms?"

"As you ordered, Monsieur le Préfet. The deputy chief and I have been hunting around for the last hour."

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"Yes," said M. Desmalions, "that Florence Levasseur strikes me as a troublesome creature. She is certainly an accomplice. But what were her relations with Sauverand and what was her connection with Don Luis Perenna? That's what I should like to know. Have you discovered nothing in her papers?"

"No, Monsieur le Préfet," said Mazeroux. "Nothing but bills and tradesmen's letters."

"And you, Weber?"

"I've found something very interesting, Monsieur le Préfet."

Weber spoke in a triumphant tone and, in answer to M. Desmalions' question, went on:

"This is a volume of Shakespeare, Monsieur le Préfet; volume eight. You will see that, contrary to the other volumes, the inside is empty and the binding forms a secret receptacle for hiding documents."

"Yes. What sort of documents?"

"Here they are: sheets of paper, blank sheets, all but three. One of them gives a list of the dates on which the mysterious letters were to appear."

"Oho!" said M. Desmalions. "That's a crushing piece of evidence against Florence Levasseur. And also it tells us where Don Luis got his list from."

PERENNA listened with surprise. He had utterly forgotten this particular, and Gaston Sauverand had made no reference to it in his narrative. And yet it was a strange and serious detail. From whom had Florence received that list of dates?

"And what's on the other two sheets?" asked M. Desmalions.

Don Luis pricked up his ears. Those two other sheets had escaped his attention on the day of his interview with Florence in this room.

"Here is one of them," said Weber.

M. Desmalions took the paper and read:

Bear in mind that the explosion isinde pendent of the letters, and that it will take place at three o'clock in the morning."

"Yes," he said, "the famous explosion which Don Luis foretold and which is to accompany the fifth letter, as announced on the list of dates. Tush! We have plenty of time, as there have been only three letters and the fourth is due tonight. Besides, blowing up that house on the Boulevard Suchet would be no easy job, by Jove! Is that all?"

"Monsieur le Préfet," said Weber, producing the third sheet, "would you mind looking at these lines drawn in pencil and enclosed in a large square containing some other, smaller squares and rectangles of all sizes? Wouldn't you say that it was the plan of a house?"

"Yes, I should."

"It is the plan of the house in which we are," declared Weber solemnly. "Here you see the front courtyard, the main building, the porter's lodge and, over there, Mlle. Levasseur's lodge. From this lodge a dotted line, in red pencil, starts zigzagging toward the main building. The commencement of this line is marked by a little red cross which stands for the room in which we are . . . or, to be more correct, the alcove. You will see here something like the design of a chimney . . . or rather a cupboard . . . a cupboard recessed behind the bed and probably hidden by the curtains."

"But in that case, Weber," said M. Desmalions, "this dotted line must represent a passage leading from this lodge to the main building. Look, there is also a little red cross at the other end of the line."

"Yes, Monsieur le Préfet, there is another cross. We shall discover later for certain what position it marks. But meanwhile, and acting on a mere guess, I have posted some men in a small room on the second floor where the last secret meeting between Don Luis, Florence Levasseur and Gaston Sauverand was held yesterday. And meanwhile, at any rate, we hold one end of the line, and through that very fact we know Don Luis Perenna's retreat."

There was a pause, after which the deputy chief resumed, in a more and more solemn voice:

"Monsieur le Préfet, yesterday I suffered a cruel outrage at the hands of that man. It was witnessed by our subordinates. The servants must be aware of it. The public will know of it before long. This man has brought about the escape of Florence Levasseur. He tried to bring about the escape of Gaston Sauverand. He is a ruffian of the most dangerous type. Monsieur le Préfet, I am sure that you will not refuse me leave to dig him out of his hole. Otherwise . . . otherwise, Monsieur le Préfet, I shall feel obliged to hand in my resignation."

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"With good reasons to back it up!" said the Prefect, laughing. "There's no doubt about it; you can't stomach the trick of the iron curtain. Well, go ahead! It's Don Luis' own lookout; he's brought it on himself. . . . Mazeroux, ring me up at the office as soon as the telephone is put right. And both of you meet me at the Fauvilles' house this evening. Don't forget it's the night for the fourth letter."

"There won't be any fourth letter, Monsieur le Préfet," said Weber.

"Why not?"

"Because between this and then Don Luis will be under lock and key."

"Oh, so you accuse Don Luis also of——"

Don Luis did not wait to hear more. He softly retreated to the cupboard, took hold of the panel and pushed it back without a sound.

So his hiding-place was known!

"By Jingo," he growled, "this is a bit awkward! I'm in a nice plight!"

He had run half way along the underground passage, with the intention of reaching the other exit. But he stopped.

"It's not worth while, as the exit's watched. Well, let's see; am I to let myself be collared? Wait a bit; let's see——"

Already there came from the alcove below a noise of blows striking on the panel, the hollow sound of which had probably attracted the deputy chief's attention. And, as Weber was not compelled to take the same precautions as Don Luis and seemed to be breaking down the panel without delaying to look for the mechanism, the danger was close at hand.

"Oh, hang it all!" muttered Don Luis. "This is too silly! What shall I do? Have a dash at them? Ah, if I had all my strength!"

But he was exhausted by want of food. His legs shook beneath him and his brain seemed to lack its usual clearness.

The increasing violence of the blows in the alcove drove him, in spite of all, toward the upper exit; and, as he climbed the ladder, he moved his electric lantern over the stones of the wall and the wood of the trap door. He even tried to lift the door with his shoulder. But he again heard a sound of footsteps above his head. The men were still there.

Then, consumed with fury and helpless, he awaited the deputy's coming.

A crash came from below; its echo spread through the tunnel, followed by a tumult of voices.

"That's it," he said to himself. "The hand-cuffs, the lockup, the cell! Good Lord, what luck . . . and what nonsense! And Marie Fauville, who's sure to do away with herself. . . . And Florence . . . Florence——"

Before extinguishing his lantern, he cast its light around him for the last time.

AT A COUPLE of yards' distance from the ladder, about three quarters of the way up and set a little way back, there was a big stone missing from the inner wall, leaving a space just large enough to crouch in.

Although the recess did not form much of a hiding-place, it was just possible that they might omit to inspect it. Besides, Don Luis had no choice. At all events, after putting out the light, he leaned toward the edge of the hole, reached it and managed to scramble in by bending himself in two.

Weber, Mazeroux and their men were coming along. Don Luis propped himself against the back of his hiding-hole to avoid as far as possible the glare of the lanterns of which he was beginning to see the gleams. And an amazing thing happened; the stone against which he was pushing toppled over slowly, as if moving on a pivot, and he fell backward into a second cavity situated behind it!

He quickly drew his legs after him and the stone swung back as slowly as before; not, however, without sending down a quantity of small stones, crumbling from the wall and half covering his legs.

"Well, well!" he chuckled. "Can Providence be siding with virtue and righteousness?"

He heard Mazeroux's voice saying:

"Nobody! And here's the end of the passage. Unless he ran away as we came—look, through the trap door at the top of this ladder."

Weber replied:

"Considering the slope by which we've come, it's certain that the trap door is on a level with the second floor. Well, the other little cross ought to mark the boudoir on the second floor, next to Don Luis' bedroom. That's what I supposed and why I posted three of our men there. If he's tried to get out on that side, he's caught."

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"We've only got to knock," said Mazeroux. "Our men will find the trap door and let us out. If not, we will break it down."

More blows echoed down the passage. Fifteen or twenty minutes after, the trap door gave way; and other voices now mingled with Weber's and Mazeroux's.

During this time Don Luis examined his domain and perceived how extremely small it was. The most that he could do was to sit in it. It was a gallery, or rather a sort of gut, a yard and a half long and ending in an orifice, narrower still, heaped up with bricks. The walls besides were formed of bricks, some of which were lacking; and the building-stones which these should have kept in place crumbled at the least touch. The ground was strewn with them.

"By Jove," thought Lupin, "I must not wriggle about too much, or I shall risk being buried alive! A pleasant prospect!"

Not only this, but the fear of making a noise kept him motionless. As a matter of fact, he was close to two rooms occupied by the detectives, first the boudoir and then the study; for the boudoir, as he knew, was over that part of his study which included the telephone-box.

The thought of this suggested another. On reflection, remembering that he used sometimes to wonder how Count Malonyi's ancestress had managed to keep alive behind the curtain on the days when she had to hide there, he realized that there must have been a communication between the secret passage and what was now the telephone-box, a communication too narrow to admit a person's body, but serving as a ventilating-shaft.

As a precaution in case the secret passage was discovered, a stone concealed the upper aperture of this shaft. Count Malonyi must have closed up the lower end when he restored the wainscoting of the study.

So there he was, imprisoned in the thickness of the walls, with no very definite intention beyond that of escaping from the clutches of the police. More hours passed.

GRADUALLY, tortured with hunger and thirst, he fell into a heavy sleep, disturbed by painful nightmares which he would have given much to be able to throw off. But he slept too deeply to recover consciousness until eight o'clock in the evening.

When he woke up, feeling very tired, he saw his position in an unexpectedly hideous light and, at the same time, so accurately that, yielding to a sudden change of opinion marked by no little fear, he resolved to leave his hiding-place and give himself up. Anything was better than the torture which he was enduring and the dangers to which longer waiting exposed him.

But, on turning around to reach the entrance to his hole, he perceived first that the stone did not swing over when merely pushed and next, after several attempts, that he could not manage to find the mechanism which no doubt worked the stone. He persisted. His exertions were all in vain. The stone did not budge. Only, at each exertion, a few bits of stone came crumbling from the upper part of the wall and still further narrowed the space in which he was able to move.

It cost him a considerable effort to master his excitement and to say jokingly:

"That's capital! I shall be reduced now to calling for help—I, Arsène Lupin! Yes, to call in the help of those gentlemen of the police! Otherwise, the odds on my being buried alive will increase every minute. They're ten to one as it is!"

He clenched his fists.

"Hang it, I'll get out of this scrape by myself! Call for help? Not if I know it!"

He summoned up all his energies to think, but his jaded brain gave him none but confused and disconnected ideas. He was haunted by Florence's image and by Marie Fauville's as well.

"It's tonight that I'm to save them," he said to himself. "And I certainly will save them, as they are not guilty and as I know the real criminal. But how shall I set about it to succeed?"

He thought of the Prefect of Police, of the meeting that was to take place at Fauville's house on the Boulevard Suchet. The meeting had begun. The police were watching the house. And this reminded him of the sheet of paper found by Weber in the eighth volume of Shakespeare's plays and of the sentence written on it, which the Prefect had read out:

Bear in mind that the explosion is independent of the letters, and that it will take place at three o'clock in the morning.

"Yes," thought Don Luis, accepting M. Desmalions' reasoning; "yes, in ten days' time. As there have been only three

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letters, the fourth will appear tonight; and the explosion will not take place until the fifth letter appears; that is, in ten days from now."

He repeated:

"In ten days . . . With the fifth letter . . . in ten days——"

And suddenly he gave a start of fright. A horrible vision had flashed across his mind, a vision only too real. The explosion was to occur that very night! And all at once, knowing that he knew the truth, all at once, in a revival of his usual clear-sightedness, he accepted the theory as certain.

No doubt, only three letters had appeared out of the mysterious darkness, but four letters ought to have appeared, because one of them had appeared not on the date fixed, but ten days later; and this for a reason which Don Luis knew. Besides, it was not a question of all this. It was not a question of seeking the truth amid this confusion of dates and letters, amid this intricate tangle in which no one could lay claim to any certainty.

No; one thing alone stood out above the situation—the sentence, "Bear in mind that the explosion is independent of the letters." And, as the explosion was put down for the night of the twenty-fifth of May, it would occur that very night, at three o'clock in the morning!

"Help! Help!" he cried.

This time, he did not hesitate. So far, he had had the courage to remain huddled in his prison and to wait for the miracle that might come to his assistance; but he preferred to face every danger and undergo every penalty rather than abandon the Prefect of Police, Weber, Mazeroux and their companions to the death that threatened them.

"Help! Help!"

Fauville's house would be blown up in three or four hours. That he knew with the greatest certainty. Just as punctually as the mysterious letters had reached their destination in spite of all the obstacles in the way, so the explosion would occur at the hour named. The infernal artificer of the accursed work had wished it so. At three o'clock in the morning there would be nothing left of the Fauvilles' house.

"Help! Help!"

He recovered enough strength to raise desperate shouts and to make his voice carry beyond the stones and beyond the wainscoting.

Then, when there seemed to be no answer to his call, he stopped and listened for a long time. There was not a sound. The silence was absolute.

Thereupon a terrible anguish covered him with a cold sweat. Supposing the detectives had ceased to watch the upper floors and confined themselves to spending the night in the rooms on the ground floor?

He madly took a brick and struck it repeatedly against the stone that closed the entrance, hoping that the noise would spread through the house. But an avalanche of small stones, loosened by the blows, at once fell upon him, knocking him down again and fixing him where he lay.

"Help! Help!"

More silence—a great, ruthless silence.

"Help! Help!"

He felt that his shouts did not penetrate the walls that stifled him. Besides, his voice was growing fainter and fainter, producing a hoarse groan that died away in his strained throat.

He ceased his cries and again listened, with all his anxious attention, to the great silence that surrounded as with layers of lead the stone coffin in which he lay imprisoned. Still nothing—not a sound. No one would come, no one could come to his assistance!

He continued to be haunted by Florence's name and image. And he thought also of Marie Fauville, whom he had promised to save. But Marie would die of self-imposed starvation. And, like her, like Gaston Sauverand and so many others, he in his turn was the victim of this monstrous horror!

An incident occurred to increase his dismay. All of a sudden his electric lantern, which he had left alight to dispel the terrors of the darkness, went out. It was eleven o'clock at night.

He was overcome with a fit of giddiness. He could hardly breathe in the close and vitiated air. His brain suffered, as it were, a physical and exceedingly painful ailment, from the repetition of images that seemed to encrust themselves there; and it was always Florence's beautiful features, of Marie's livid face. And, in his distraught brain, while Marie lay dying, he heard the explosion at the Fauvilles' house and saw the Prefect of Police and Mazeroux lying hideously mutilated, dead.

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A numbness crept over him. He fell into a sort of swoon, in which he continued to stammer confused syllables:

"Florence . . . Marie . . . Marie——"

CHAPTER XV

THE EXPLOSION

THE fourth mysterious letter! The fourth of those letters "posted by the devil and delivered by the devil," as one of the newspapers expressed it!

We all of us remember the really extraordinary agitation of the public as the night of the twenty-fifth of May drew near. And fresh news increased this interest to a yet higher degree.

People heard in quick succession of the arrest of Sauverand, the flight of his accomplice, Florence Levasseur, Don Luis Perenna's secretary, and the inexplicable disappearance of Perenna himself, whom they insisted, for the best of reasons, on identifying with Arsène Lupin.

The police, assured from this moment of victory and having nearly all the actors in the tragedy in their power, had gradually given way to indiscretion; and, thanks to the particulars revealed to this or that journalist, the public knew of Don Luis' change of attitude, suspected his passion for Florence Levasseur and the real cause of his right-about-face, and thrilled with excitement as they saw that astonishing figure enter upon a fresh struggle.

What was he going to do? If he wanted to save the woman he loved from prosecution and to release Marie and Sauverand from prison, he would have to intervene some time that night, to take part, somehow or other, in the event at hand and to prove the innocence of the three accomplices, either by arresting the invisible bearer of the fourth letter or by suggesting some plausible explanation. In short, he would have to be there; and that was interesting indeed!

And then the news of Marie Fauville was not good. With unwavering obstinacy she persisted in her suicidal plans. She had to be artificially fed; and the doctors in the infirmary at Saint Lazare did not conceal their anxiety. Would Don Luis Perenna arrive in time?

Lastly there was that one other thing—the threat of an explosion which was to blow up Hippolytè Fauville's house ten days after the delivery of the fourth letter; a really impressive threat when it was remembered that the enemy had never announced anything that did not take place at the stated hour. And, although it was still ten days—at least, so people thought—from the date fixed for the catastrophe, the threat made the whole business look more and more sinister.

That evening, therefore, an absolute crowd made its way through La Muette and Auteuil, to the Boulevard Suchet—a crowd coming not only from Paris, but also from the suburbs and the provinces. The spectacle was exciting; and people wanted to see.

They saw only from a distance, for the police had barred the approaches a hundred yards from either side of the house and were driving into the ditches of the fortifications all those who managed to climb the opposite slope.

The sky was stormy, with heavy clouds revealed at intervals by the light of a silver moon. There were lightning-flashes and the peals of distant thunder. Men sang. Street-boys imitated the noises of animals. People formed themselves into groups on the benches and pavements and ate and drank while discussing the matter.

A part of the night was spent in this way and nothing happened to reward the patience of the crowd, who began to wonder, somewhat wearily, if they would not do better to go home, seeing that Sauverand was in prison and that there was every chance that the fourth letter would not appear in the same mysterious way as the others.

And yet they did not go: Don Luis Perenna was due to come!

From ten o'clock in the evening the Prefect of Police and his secretary general, the chief detective and Weber, his deputy, Sergeant Mazeroux and two detectives were gathered in the large room in which Fauville had been murdered. Fifteen more detectives occupied the remaining rooms, while some twenty others watched the roofs, the outside of the house and the garden.

Once again a thorough search had been made during the afternoon, with no better results than before. But it was decided that all the men should keep awake. If the letter was delivered anywhere in the big room, they wanted to know and they meant

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to know who brought it. The police do not recognize miracles.

At twelve o'clock M. Desmalions had coffee served to his subordinates. He himself took two cups and never ceased walking from one end to the other of the room, or climbing the staircase that led to the attic, or going through the passage and hall. Preferring that the watch should be maintained under the most favorable conditions, he left all the doors opened and all the electric lights on.

Mazeroux objected:

"It has to be dark for the letter to come. You will remember, Monsieur le Préfet, that the other experiment was tried before and the letter was not delivered."

"We will try it again," replied M. Desmalions, who in spite of everything was really afraid of Don Luis' interference and increased his measures to make it impossible.

MEANWHILE as the night wore on the minds of all those present became impatient. Prepared for the angry struggle as they were, they longed for the opportunity to show their strength. They made desperate use of their ears and eyes.

At one o'clock there was an alarm that showed the pitch which the nervous tension had reached. A shot was fired on the first floor, followed by shouts. On inquiry it was found that two detectives, meeting in the course of a round, had not recognized each other; and one of them discharged his revolver in the air to inform his comrades.

In the meantime the crowd outside had diminished, as M. Desmalions perceived on opening the garden gate. The orders had been relaxed and sightseers were allowed to come nearer, though they were still kept at a distance from the pavement.

Mazeroux said—

"It is a good thing that the explosion is due in ten days' time and not tonight, Monsieur le Préfet; otherwise, all those good people would be in danger as well as ourselves."

"There will be no explosion in ten days' time, any more than there will be a letter tonight," said M. Desmalions, shrugging his shoulders. And he added, "Besides, on that day the orders will be strict."

It was now ten minutes past two.

At twenty-five minutes past, as the Prefect was lighting a cigar, the chief detective ventured to joke.

"That's something you will have to do without, next time, Monsieur le Préfet. It would be too risky."

"Next time," said M. Desmalions, "I shall not waste time in keeping watch. For I really begin to think that all this business with the letters is over."

"You can never tell," suggested Mazeroux.

A few minutes more passed. M. Desmalions had sat down. The others also were seated. No one spoke.

And suddenly they all sprang up, with one movement and the same expression of surprise.

A bell had rung.

They at once heard where the sound came from.

"The telephone," M. Desmalions muttered.

He took down the receiver.

"Hullo! Who are you?"

A voice answered, but so distant and so faint that he could catch only an incoherent noise and exclaimed:

"Speak louder! What is it? Who are you?"

The voice spluttered out a few syllables that seemed to astound him.

"Hullo!" he said. "I don't understand. Please repeat what you said. Who is it speaking?"

"Don Luis Perenna," was the answer, more distinctly this time.

The Prefect made as if to hang up the receiver; and he growled:

"It's a hoax. Some fool amusing himself at our expense."

Nevertheless, in spite of himself he went on in a gruff voice:

"Look here, what is it? You say you're Don Luis Perenna?"

"Yes."

"What do you want?"

"What's the time?"

The Prefect made an angry gesture, not so much because of the ridiculous question as because he had really recognized Don Luis' voice beyond mistake:

"Well?" he said, controlling himself. "What's all this about? Where are you?"

"At my house, above the iron curtain, in the ceiling of my study."

"In the ceiling?" repeated the Prefect, not knowing what to think.

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"Yes; and more or less done for, I confess."

"We'll send and help you out," said M. Desmalions, who was beginning to enjoy himself.

"Later on, Monsieur le Préfet. First answer me. Quickly! If not, I don't know that I shall have the strength. What's the time?"

"Oh, look here!"

"I beg of you——"

"It's twenty minutes to three."

"Twenty minutes to three!"

It was as if Don Luis found renewed strength in a sudden fit of fear. His weak voice recovered its emphasis, and, by turns imperious, despairing and beseeching, full of a conviction which he did his utmost to impart to M. Desmalions, he said:

"Go away, Monsieur le Préfet. Go, all of you; leave the house. The house will be blown up at three o'clock. Yes, yes, I swear it will! Ten days after the fourth letter means now, because there has been a ten days' delay in the delivery of the letters. It means now, at three o'clock in the morning. Remember what was written on the sheet which Deputy Chief Weber handed you this morning: 'The explosion is independent of the letters. It will take place at three o'clock in the morning.' At three o'clock in the morning today, Monsieur le Préfet!" The voice faltered and then continued:

"Go away, please. Let no one remain in the house. You must believe me. I know everything about the business. And nothing can prevent the threat from being executed. Go, go, go! This is horrible: I feel that you do not believe me . . . and I have no strength left. . . . Go away, every one of you!"

He said a few more words which M. Desmalions could not make out. Then the voice ceased; and, though the Prefect still heard cries, it seemed to him that those cries were distant, as if the instrument were no longer within the reach of the mouth that uttered them.

He hung up the receiver.

"Gentlemen," he said with a smile, "it is seventeen to three. In seventeen minutes we shall all be blown up together. At least, that is what our good friend Don Luis Perenna declares."

In spite of the jokes with which this threat was met, there was a general feeling of uneasiness. Weber asked—

"Was it really Don Luis, Monsieur le Préfet?"

"Don Luis in person. He has gone to earth in some hiding-hole in his house, above the study; and his fatigue and privations seem to have unsettled him a little. Mazeroux, go and ferret him out . . . unless this is just some fresh trick on his part. You have your warrant."

Sergeant Mazeroux went up to M. Desmalions. His face was pallid.

"Monsieur le Préfet, did *he* tell you that we were going to be blown up?"

"He did. He relies on the note which M. Weber found in a volume of Shakespeare. The explosion is to take place tonight."

"At three o'clock in the morning?"

"At three o'clock in the morning; that is to say, in less than a quarter of an hour."

"And do you propose to remain, Monsieur le Préfet?"

"What next, sergeant? Do you imagine that we are going to obey that gentleman's fancies?"

Mazeroux staggered, hesitated, and then, despite all his natural deference, unable to contain himself, exclaimed:

"Monsieur le Préfet, it's not a fancy. I have worked with Don Luis. I know the man. If he tells you that something is going to happen, it's because he has his reasons."

"Absurd reasons."

"No, no, Monsieur le Préfet!" Mazeroux pleaded, growing more and more excited. "I swear that you must listen to him. The house will be blown up—he said so—at three o'clock. We have a few minutes left. Let us go. . . . I entreat you, Monsieur le Préfet!"

"In other words, you want us to run away."

"But it's not running away, Monsieur le Préfet! It's a simple precaution. After all, we can't risk. . . . You yourself, Monsieur le Préfet——"

"That will do!"

"But, Monsieur le Préfet, as Don Luis said——"

"That will do, I say!" repeated the Prefect harshly. "If you're afraid, you can take advantage of the order which I gave you and go off after Don Luis."

Mazeroux clicked his heels together and, old soldier that he was, saluted.

"I shall stay here, Monsieur le Préfet."

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And he turned and went back to his place at a distance.

SILENCE followed. M. Desmalions began to walk up and down the room, with his hands behind his back. Then, addressing the chief detective and the secretary general—

"You are of my opinion, I hope?" he said.

"Why, yes, Monsieur le Préfet."

"Well, of course! To begin with, that supposition is based on nothing serious. And besides, we are guarded, aren't we? Bombs don't come tumbling on one's head like that. It takes some one to throw them. Well, how are they to come? By what way?"

"Same way as the letters," the secretary general ventured to suggest.

"What's that? Then you admit——?"

The secretary general did not reply and M. Desmalions did not complete his sentence. He himself, like the others, experienced that same feeling of uneasiness which gradually, as the seconds sped past, was becoming almost intolerably painful.

Three o'clock in the morning! . . . The words kept on recurring to his mind. Twice he looked at his watch. There were twelve minutes left. There were ten minutes. Was the house really going to be blown up, by the mere effect of an infernal and all-powerful will?

"It's senseless, absolutely senseless!" he cried, stamping his foot.

But on looking at his companions he was amazed to see how drawn their faces were; and he felt his courage sink in a strange way. He was certainly not afraid; and the others were no more afraid than he. But all of them, from the chiefs to the simple detectives, were under the influence of that Don Luis Perenna whom they had seen accomplishing such extraordinary feats and who had shown such wonderful ability throughout this mysterious adventure.

Consciously or unconsciously, whether they wished it or no, they looked upon him as an exceptional being, endowed with special faculties, a being of whom they could not think without conjuring up the image of the amazing Arsène Lupin, with his legend of daring, genius and superhuman insight.

And Lupin was telling them to fly. Pursued and hunted as he was, he voluntarily gave himself up to warn them of their danger. And the danger was immediate. Seven minutes more, six minutes more; and the house would be blown up.

With great simplicity Mazeroux went on his knees, made the sign of the cross and said his prayers in a low voice. The action was so impressive that the secretary general and the chief detective made a movement as if to go toward the Prefect of Police.

M. Desmalions turned away his head and continued his walk up and down the room. But his anguish increased; and the words which he had heard over the telephone rang in his ears; and all Perenna's authority, his ardent entreaties, his frenzied conviction—all this upset him. He had seen Perenna at work. He felt it borne in upon him that he had no right, in the present circumstances, to neglect the man's warning.

"Let's go," he said.

The words were spoken in the calmest manner; and it really seemed as if those who heard them regarded them merely as the sensible conclusion of a very ordinary state of affairs. They went away without hurry or disorder, not as fugitives, but as men deliberately obeying the dictates of prudence.

They stood back at the door to let the Prefect go first.

"No," he said, "go on; I'll follow you."

He was the last out, leaving the electric light full on.

In the hall he asked the chief detective to blow his whistle. When all the plain-clothes men had assembled, he sent them out of the house, together with the porter, and shut the door behind him.

Then, calling the detectives who were watching the boulevard, he said:

"Let everybody stand a good distance away; push the crowd as far back as you can; and be quick about it. We shall enter the house again in half an hour."

"And you, Monsieur le Préfet?" whispered Mazeroux. "You won't remain here, I hope?"

"No, that I sha'n't!" he said, laughing. "If I take our friend Perenna's advice at all, I may as well take it thoroughly!"

"There are only two minutes left."

"Our friend Perenna spoke of three o'clock, not of two minutes to three. So——"

He crossed the boulevard, accompanied by his secretary general, the chief detective and Mazeroux, and clambered up the slope

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of the fortifications opposite the house.

"Perhaps we ought to stoop down," suggested Mazeroux.

"Let's stoop, by all means," said the Prefect, still in a good humor. "But honestly, if there's no explosion I shall send a bullet through my head. I could not go on living after making myself look so ridiculous."

"There will be an explosion, Monsieur le Préfet," declared Mazeroux.

"What confidence you must have in our friend Don Luis!"

"You have just the same confidence, Monsieur le Préfet."

They were silent, irritated by the wait and struggling with the absurd anxiety that oppressed them. They counted the seconds singly by the beating of their hearts. It was interminable.

Three o'clock sounded from somewhere.

"You see," grinned M. Desmalions in an altered voice, "you see! There's nothing, thank goodness!"

And he growled:

"It's idiotic, perfectly idiotic! How could any one imagine such nonsense!"

Another clock struck, farther away. Then the hour also rang from the roof of a neighboring building.

Before the third stroke had sounded they heard a kind of cracking; and the next moment came the terrible blast, complete, but so brief that they had only, so to speak, a vision of an immense sheaf of flames and smoke, shooting forth enormous stones and pieces of wall, something like the grand finale of a fireworks-display. And it was all over. The volcano had erupted.

"Look sharp!" shouted the Prefect of Police, darting forward. "Telephone for the engines, quick, in case of fire!"

He caught Mazeroux by the arm.

"Run to my motor; you'll see her a hundred yards down the boulevard. Tell the man to drive you to Don Luis and, if you find him, release him and bring him here."

"Under arrest, Monsieur le Préfet?"

"Under arrest? You're mad!"

"But if the deputy chief——"

"The deputy chief will keep his mouth shut. I'll see to that. Be off!"

Mazeroux fulfilled his mission, not with greater speed than if he had been sent to arrest Don Luis—for Mazeroux was a conscientious man—but with extraordinary pleasure. The fight which he had been obliged to wage against the man whom he still called "the chief" had often distressed him to the point of tears. This time the sergeant was coming to help him, perhaps to save his life.

That afternoon the deputy chief had ceased his search of the house—by M. Desmalions' orders, as Don Luis' escape seemed certain—and left only three men on duty. Mazeroux found them in a room on the ground floor, where they were sitting up in turns. In reply to his questions, they declared that they had not heard a sound.

He went upstairs alone, so as to have no witnesses to his interview with the chief, passed through the drawing-room and entered the study.

Here he was overcome with anxiety, for, after turning on the light, the first glance revealed nothing to his eyes.

"Chief!" he cried repeatedly. "Where are you, chief?"

No answer.

"And yet," thought Mazeroux, "as he telephoned, he can't be far away."

In fact, he saw from where he stood that the receiver was hanging from its cord; and on going to the telephone-box he stumbled over bits of brick and plaster that strewed the carpet. He then switched on the light in the box as well and saw a hand and arm hanging from the ceiling above him. The ceiling was broken up all around that arm. But the shoulder had not been able to pass through; and Mazeroux could not see the captive's head.

He sprang on to a chair and reached the hand. He felt it and was reassured by the warmth of its touch.

"Is that you, Mazeroux?" asked a voice that seemed to the sergeant to come from very far away.

"Yes, it's I. You're not wounded, are you? Nothing serious?"

"No; only stunned . . . and a bit faint . . . from hunger . . . Listen to me."

"I'm listening."

"Open the second drawer on the left in my writing-desk . . . You'll find——"

"Yes, chief?"

"An old stick of chocolate."

"But——"

"Do as I tell you, Alexandre; I'm famished."

Indeed, Don Luis recovered after a moment or two and said in a gayer voice:

"That's better. I can wait now. Go to

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the kitchen and fetch me some bread and some water."

"I'll be back at once, chief."

"Not this way. Come back by Florence Levasseur's room and the secret passage to the ladder which leads to the trap door at the top."

And he told Mazeroux how to make the stone swing out and how to enter the hollow in which he had expected to meet with such a tragic end.

The thing was done in ten minutes. Mazeroux cleared the opening, caught hold of Don Luis by the legs and pulled him out of his hole.

"Oh dear, oh dear!" he moaned in a voice full of pity. "What a position, chief! How did you manage it all? Yes, I see; you must have dug down, where you lay, and gone on digging . . . for more than a yard! And it took some pluck, I expect, on an empty stomach!"

When Don Luis was seated in his bedroom and had swallowed a few bits of bread and drunk what he wanted, he told his story.

"Yes, it took the devil's own pluck, old man. By jingo, when a chap's ideas are whirling in his head and he can't use his brain, upon my word, all he asks is to die! And then there was no air, you see. I couldn't breathe. I went on digging, however, as you saw; went on digging while I was half asleep, in a sort of nightmare. Just look; my fingers are in a jelly. But there, I was thinking of that confounded business of the explosion and I wanted to warn you at all costs and I dug away at my tunnel. What a job! And then, *oof!* I felt space at last!

"I got my hand through and next my arm. Where was I? Why, over the telephone, of course! I knew that at once by feeling the wall and finding the wires. Then it took me quite half an hour to get hold of the instrument. I couldn't reach it with my arm.

"I managed at last with a piece of string and a slip-knot to fish up the receiver and hold it near my mouth, or, say, at ten inches from my mouth. And then I shouted and roared to make my voice carry; and all the time I was in pain. And then, at last, my string broke . . . And then . . . and then . . . I hadn't an ounce of strength left in my body . . . Besides, you fellows had been warned; and it was for you to get yourselves out of the mess."

He looked at Mazeroux and asked, as if certain of the reply—

"The explosion took place, didn't it?"

"Yes, chief."

"At three o'clock exactly?"

"Yes."

"And of course M. Desmalions had the house cleared?"

"Yes."

"At the last minute?"

"At the last minute."

Don Luis laughed and said:

"I knew he would wait about and not give way until the crucial moment. You must have had a bad time of it, my poor Mazeroux, for of course you agreed with me from the start."

He kept on eating while he talked; and each mouthful seemed to bring back a little of his usual animation.

"Funny thing, hunger!" he said. "Makes you feel so light-headed. I must practise getting used to it, however."

"At any rate, chief, no one would believe that you have been fasting for nearly forty-eight hours."

"Ah, that comes of having a sound constitution, with something to fall back upon! I shall be a different man in half an hour. Just give me time to shave and have a bath."

When he had finished dressing he sat down to the breakfast of eggs and cold meat which Mazeroux had prepared for him; and then, getting up, said—

"Now, let's be off."

"But there's no hurry, chief. Why don't you lie down for a few hours? The Prefect can wait."

"You're mad! What about Marie Fauville?"

"Marie Fauville?"

"Why, of course! Do you think I'm going to leave her in prison, or Sauverand either? There's not a second to lose, old fellow."

Mazeroux thought to himself that the chief had not quite recovered his wits yet. What! Release Marie Fauville and Sauverand, one, two, three, just like that? No, no; it was going a bit too far.

However, he took down to the Prefect's car a new Perenna, merry, brisk and as fresh as if he had just got out of bed.

"Very flattering to my pride," said Don Luis to Mazeroux; "most flattering, that hesitation of the Prefect's, after I had

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warned him over the telephone, followed by his submission at the decisive moment. What a hold I must have on all those fellows, to make them sit up at a sign from little me! 'Beware, gentlemen!' I telephone to them from the bottomless pit. 'Beware! At three o'clock, a bomb!' 'Nonsense!' say they. 'Not a bit of it!' say I. 'How do you know?' 'Because I do.' 'But what proof have you?' 'What proof? That I say so.' 'Oh, well! Of course, if you say so——!' And at five minutes to three out they march. Ah, if I weren't built up of modesty——!"

THEY came to the Boulevard Suchet, where the crowd was so dense that they had to alight from the car. Mazeroux passed through the cordon of police protecting the approaches to the house and took Don Luis to the slope across the road.

"Wait for me here, chief. I'll tell the Prefect of Police."

On the other side of the boulevard, under the pale morning sky in which a few black clouds still lingered, Don Luis saw the havoc wrought by the explosion. It was apparently not so great as he had expected. Some of the ceilings had fallen in and their rubbish showed through the yawning cavities of the windows; but the house remained standing. Even Fauville's built-out annex had not suffered overmuch; and, strange to say, the electric light, which the Prefect had left burning on his departure, had not gone out. The garden and the road were covered with stacks of furniture, over which a number of soldiers and police kept watch.

"Come with me, chief," said Mazeroux, as he fetched Don Luis and led him toward the engineer's workroom.

A part of the floor was demolished. The outer walls on the left, near the passage, were cracked; and two workmen were fixing up beams, brought from the nearest timber-yard, to support the ceiling. But on the whole the explosion had not had the results which the man who prepared it must have anticipated.

M. Desmalions was there, together with all the men who had spent the night in the room and several important persons from the Public Prosecutor's Office. Weber, the deputy chief detective, alone had gone, refusing to meet his enemy.

DON LUIS' arrival caused great excitement. The Prefect at once came up to him and said:

"All our thanks, monsieur! Your insight is above praise. You have saved our lives; and these gentlemen and I wish to tell you so most emphatically. In my case, it is the second time that I have to thank you."

"There is a very simple way of thanking me, Monsieur le Préfet," said Don Luis, "and that is to allow me to carry out my task to the end."

"Your task?"

"Yes, Monsieur le Préfet. My action of last night is only the beginning. The conclusion is the release of Marie Fauville and Gaston Sauverand."

M. Desmalions smiled.

"Oh!"

"Am I asking too much, Monsieur le Préfet?"

"One can always ask, but the request should be reasonable. And the innocence of those people does not depend on me."

"No; but it depends on you, Monsieur le Préfet, to let them know if I prove their innocence to you."

"Yes, I agree, if you prove it beyond dispute."

"Just so."

"Don Luis' calm assurance impressed M. Desmalions in spite of everything and even more than on the former occasions; and he suggested:

"The results of the hasty inspection which we have made will perhaps help you. For instance, we are certain that the bomb was placed by the entrance to the passage and probably under the boards of the floor."

"Please do not trouble, Monsieur le Préfet. These are only secondary details. The great thing now is that you should know the whole truth; and that not only through words."

The Prefect had come closer. The magistrate and detectives were standing around Don Luis, watching his lips and movements with feverish impatience. Was it possible that that truth, as yet so remote and vague, in spite of all the importance which they attached to the arrests already effected, was known at last?

It was a solemn moment. Every one was on tenter-hooks. The manner in which Don Luis had foretold the explosion lent the value of an accomplished fact to his predictions; and the men whom he had saved

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from the terrible catastrophe were almost ready to accept as certainties the most improbable statements which a man of his stamp might make.

"Monsieur le Préfet," he said, "you waited in vain last night for the fourth letter to make its appearance. We shall now be able, by an unexpected miracle of chance, to be present at the delivery of the letter. You will then know that it was the same hand that committed all the crimes . . . and you will know whose hand that was."

And, turning to Mazeroux:

"Sergeant, will you please make the room as dark as you can? The shutters are gone; but you might draw the curtains across the windows and close the doors. Monsieur le Préfet, is it by accident that the electric light is on?"

"Yes; by accident. We will have it turned out."

"One moment. Have any of you gentlemen a pocket-lantern about you? Or no, it doesn't matter. This will do."

There was a candle in a sconce. He took it and lit it.

Then he switched off the electric light.

There was a half darkness, amid which the flame of the candle flickered in the draft from the windows. Don Luis protected the flame with his hand and moved to the table.

"I do not think that we shall be kept waiting long," he said. "As I foresee it, there will be only a few seconds before the facts speak for themselves, and better than I could do."

Those few seconds, during which no one broke the silence, were unforgettable. M. Desmalions has since declared, in an interview in which he ridicules himself very cleverly, that his brain, over-stimulated by the fatigues of the night and by the whole scene before him, imagined the most unlikely events, such as an invasion of the house by armed assailants, or the apparition of ghosts and spirits.

He had the curiosity, however, he said, to watch Don Luis. Sitting on the edge of the table, with his head thrown a little back and his eyes roaming over the ceiling, Don Luis was eating a piece of bread and nibbling at a cake of chocolate. He seemed very hungry, but quite at his ease.

The others maintained that tense attitude which we put on at moments of great physical effort. Their faces were distorted with a sort of grimace. They were haunted by the memory of the explosion as well as obsessed by what was going to happen. The flame of the candle cast shadows on the wall.

More seconds elapsed than Don Luis Perenna had said—thirty or forty seconds, perhaps, that seemed endless. Then Perenna lifted the candle a little and said—

"There you are!"

They had all seen what they now saw almost as soon as he spoke. A letter was descending from the ceiling. It spun around slowly, like a leaf falling from a tree without being driven by the wind. It just touched Don Luis and alighted on the floor between two legs of the table.

Picking up the paper and handing it to M. Desmalions, Don Luis said:

"There you are, Monsieur le Préfet. This is the fourth letter, due last night."

CHAPTER XVI

THE "HATER"

M. DESMALIONS looked at him without understanding, and looked from him to the ceiling. Perenna said:

"Oh, there's no witchcraft about it; and, though no one has thrown that letter from above, though there is not the smallest hole in the ceiling, the explanation is quite simple!"

"Quite simple, is it?" said M. Desmalions.

"Yes, Monsieur le Préfet. It all looks like an extremely complicated conjuring trick, done almost for fun. Well, I say that it is quite simple . . . and, at the same time, terribly tragic. Sergeant Mazeroux, would you mind drawing back the curtains and giving us as much light as possible?"

While Mazeroux was executing his orders and M. Desmalions was glancing at the fourth letter, the contents of which were unimportant and merely confirmed the previous ones, Don Luis took a pair of steps which the workmen had left in the corner, set it up in the middle of the room and climbed to the top, where, seated astride, he was able to reach the electric chandelier.

It consisted of a broad circular band in brass, beneath which was a festoon of crystal pendants. Inside were three lamps placed at the corners of a brass triangle concealing the wires.

He uncovered the wires and cut them.

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Then he began to take the whole fitting to pieces. To hasten matters, he asked for a hammer and broke up the plaster all around the clamps that held the chandelier in position.

"Lend me a hand, please," he said to Mazeroux.

Mazeroux went up the steps; and between them they took hold of the chandelier and let it slide down the uprights. The detectives caught it and placed it on the table with some difficulty, for it was much heavier than it looked.

On inspection, it proved to be surmounted by a cubical metal box, measuring about eight inches square, which box, being fastened inside the ceiling between the iron clamps, had necessitated Don Luis' knocking away the plaster that concealed it.

"What the devil's this?" exclaimed M. Desmalions.

"Open it for yourself, Monsieur le Préfet; there's a lid to it," said Perenna.

M. Desmalions raised the lid. The box was filled with springs and wheels—a whole complicated and detailed mechanism resembling a piece of clockwork.

"By your leave, Monsieur le Préfet," said Don Luis.

He took out one piece of machinery and discovered another beneath it, joined to the first by the gearing of two wheels; and the second was more like one of those automatic apparatuses which turn out printed slips.

Right at the bottom of the box, just where the box touched the ceiling, was a semicircular groove; and at the edge of it was a letter ready for delivery.

"The last of the five letters," said Don Luis, "doubtless continuing the series of denunciations. You will notice, Monsieur le Préfet, that the chandelier originally had a fourth lamp in the center. It was obviously removed when the chandelier was altered, so as to make room for the letters to pass."

He continued his detailed explanations:

"So the whole set of letters was placed here, at the bottom. A clever piece of machinery, controlled by clockwork, took them one by one at the appointed time, pushed them to the edge of the groove concealed between the lamps and the pendants and projected them into space."

None of those standing around Don Luis spoke, and all of them seemed perhaps a little disappointed. The whole thing was certainly very clever; but they had expected something better than a trick of springs and wheels, however surprising.

"Have patience, gentlemen," said Don Luis. "I promised you something ghastly; and you shall have it."

"Well, I agree," said the Prefect of Police, "that this is where the letters started from. But a good many points remain obscure; and, apart from this, there is one fact in particular which it seems impossible to understand. How were the criminals able to adapt the chandelier in this way? And, in a house guarded by the police, in a room watched night and day, how were they able to carry out such a piece of work without being seen or heard?"

"The answer is quite easy, Monsieur le Préfet. The work was done before the house was guarded by the police."

"Before the murder was committed, therefore?"

"Before the murder was committed."

"And what is to prove to me that that is so?"

"You have said so yourself, Monsieur le Préfet: because it could not have been otherwise."

"But do explain yourself, monsieur!" cried M. Desmalions with a gesture of irritation. "If you have important things to tell us, why delay?"

"It is better, Monsieur le Préfet, that you should arrive at the truth in the same way as I did. When you know the secret of the letters, the truth is much nearer than you think; and you would have already named the criminal if the horror of his crime had not been so great as to divert all suspicion from him."

M. Desmalions looked at Don Luis attentively. He felt the importance of Perenna's every word and he was really anxious.

"Then, according to you," he said, "those letters accusing Madame Fauville and Gaston Sauverand were placed there with the sole object of ruining both of them?"

"Yes, Monsieur le Préfet."

"And, as they were placed there before the crime, the plot must have been schemed before the murder?"

"Yes, Monsieur le Préfet; before the murder. From the moment that we admit the innocence of Mme. Fauville and Gaston Sauverand we are obliged to conclude that, as everything accuses them, this is due to a

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series of deliberate acts. Mme. Fauville was out on the night of the murder: a plot! She was unable to say how she spent her time while the murder was being committed: a plot! Her inexplicable drive in the direction of La Muette, and her cousin Sauverand's walk in the neighborhood of the house: plots! The marks left in the apple by those teeth, by Mme. Fauville's own teeth: a plot, and the most infernal of all!

"I tell you, everything is plotted beforehand; everything is, so to speak, prepared, measured out, labeled and numbered. Everything takes place at the appointed time. Nothing is left to chance. It is a work very nicely pieced together, worthy of the most skilful artisan, so solidly constructed that outside happenings have not been able to throw it out of gear, and that the scheme works exactly, precisely, imperturbably . . . like the clockwork in this box, which is a perfect symbol of the whole business and at the same time gives a most accurate explanation of it, because the letters denouncing the murderers were duly posted before the crime and delivered after the crime on the dates and at the hours foreseen."

M. Desmalions remained thinking for a time and then objected—

"Still, in the letters which he wrote M. Fauville accuses his wife."

"He does."

"We must therefore admit either that he was right in accusing her or that the letters are forged?"

"They are not forged. All the experts have recognized M. Fauville's handwriting."

"Then?"

"Then——"

Don Luis did not finish his sentence; and M. Desmalions felt the breath of the truth fluttering still nearer around him.

The others, one and all as anxious as himself, were silent. He muttered—

"I do not understand——"

"Yes, Monsieur le Préfet, you do. You understand that, if the sending of those letters forms an integral part of the plot hatched against Mme. Fauville and Gaston Sauverand, it is because their contents were prepared in such a way as to be the undoing of the victims."

"What! What! What are you saying?"

"I am saying what I said before. Once they are innocent, everything that tells against them is part of the plot."

AGAIN there was a long silence. The Prefect of Police did not conceal his agitation. Speaking very slowly, with his eyes fixed on Don Luis' eyes, he said—

"Whoever the culprit may be, I know nothing more terrible than this work of hatred."

"It is an even more improbable work than you can imagine, Monsieur le Préfet," said Perenna with growing animation, "and it is a hatred of which you, who do not know Sauverand's confession, can not yet estimate the violence. I understood it completely as I listened to the man; and since then all my thoughts have been overpowered by the dominant idea of that hatred. Who could hate like that? To whose loathing had Marie Fauville and Sauverand been sacrificed? Who was the inconceivable person whose perverted genius had surrounded his two victims with chains so powerfully forged? . . .

"And another idea came to my mind, an earlier idea which had already struck me several times and to which I have already referred in Sergeant Mazeroux's presence: I mean the really mathematical character of the appearance of the letters. I said to myself that such grave documents could not be introduced into the case at fixed dates unless some primary reason demanded that those dates should absolutely be fixed. What reason? If a *human* agency had been at work each time, there would surely have been some irregularity dependent on this, especially after the police had become cognizant of the matter and were present at the delivery of the letters.

"Well," Perenna continued, "in spite of every obstacle, the letters continued to come, as if they could not help it. And thus the reason of their coming gradually dawned upon me: they came mechanically, by some invisible process set going once and for all and working with the blind certainty of a physical law. This was a case not of a conscious intelligence and will, but just of material necessity. . . . It was the clash of these two ideas—the idea of the hatred pursuing the innocent and the idea of that machinery serving the schemes of the 'hater'—it was their clash that gave birth to the little spark of light. When brought into contact, the two ideas combined in my mind and suggested the recollection that Hippolyte Fauville was an engineer by profession!"

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The others listened to him with a sort of uneasy oppression. What was gradually being revealed of the tragedy, instead of relieving the anxiety, increased it until it became absolutely painful.

M. Desmalions objected—

"Granting that the letters arrived on the dates named, you will nevertheless have noted that the hour varied on each occasion."

"That is to say, it varied according as we watched in the dark or not, and that is just the detail which supplied me with the key to the riddle. If the letters—and this was an indispensable precaution, which we are now able to understand—were delivered only under cover of the darkness, it must be because a contrivance of some kind prevented them from appearing when the electric light was on, and because that contrivance was controlled by a switch inside the room. There is no other explanation possible.

"We have to do with an automatic distributor that delivers the incriminating letters which it contains by clockwork, releasing them only between this hour and that on such and such a night fixed in advance and only at times when the electric light is off. You have the apparatus before you. No doubt the experts will admire its ingenuity and confirm my assertions. But, given the fact that it was found in the ceiling of this room, given the fact that it contained letters written by M. Fauville, am I not entitled to say that it was constructed by M. Fauville, the electrical engineer?"

Once more the name of M. Fauville returned, like an obsession; and each time the name stood more clearly defined. It was first M. Fauville; then M. Fauville, the engineer; then M. Fauville, the electrical engineer. And thus the picture of the "hater," as Don Luis said, appeared in its accurate outlines, giving those men, used though they were to the strangest criminal monstrosities, a thrill of terror. The truth was now no longer prowling around them. They were already fighting with it, as you fight with an adversary whom you do not see but who clutches you by the throat and brings you to the ground.

And the Prefect of Police, summing up his impressions, said in a strained voice—

"So M. Fauville wrote those letters in order to ruin his wife and the man who was in love with her?"

"Yes."

"In that case——"

"What?"

"Knowing, at the same time, that he was threatened with death, he wished, if ever the threat were realized, that his death should be laid to the charge of his wife and her friend?"

"Yes."

"And, in order to revenge himself on their love for each other and to gratify his hatred of them both, he wanted the whole set of facts to point to them as guilty of the murder of which he would be the victim?"

"Yes."

"So that . . . so that M. Fauville, in one part of his accursed work, was—what shall I say?—the accomplice of his own murder. He dreaded death. He struggled against it. But he arranged that his hatred should gain by it. That's it, isn't it? That's how it is?"

"Almost, Monsieur le Préfet. You are following the same stages by which I traveled and, like myself, you are hesitating before the last truth, before the truth which gives the tragedy its sinister character and deprives it of all human proportions."

The Prefect struck the table with his two fists and, in a sudden fit of revolt, cried:

"It's ridiculous! It's a perfectly preposterous theory! M. Fauville threatened with death and contriving his wife's ruin with that Machiavellian perseverance? Absurd! The man who came to my office, the man whom you saw, was thinking of only one thing: how to escape dying! He was obsessed by one dread alone—the dread of death.

"It is not at such moments," the Prefect emphasized, "that a man fits up clockwork and lays traps, especially when those traps can not take effect unless he dies by foul play. Can you see M. Fauville working at his automatic machine, putting in with his own hands letters which he has taken the pains to write to a friend three months before and intercept, arranging events so that his wife shall appear guilty and saying, 'There! If I die murdered, I'm easy in my mind: the person to be arrested will be Marie!'

"No; you must confess, men don't take these gruesome precautions. Or, if they do . . . if they do, it means that they're sure of being murdered. It means that they agree to be murdered. It means that they are at one with the murderer, so to speak,

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and meet him half way. In short, it means——"

He interrupted himself, as if the sentences which he had spoken had surprised him. And the others seemed equally disconcerted. And all of them unconsciously drew from those sentences the conclusions which they implied and which they themselves did not yet fully perceive.

Don Luis did not remove his eyes from the Prefect and awaited the inevitable words.

M. Desmalions muttered—

"Come, come, you are not going to suggest that he had agreed——"

"I suggest nothing, Monsieur le Préfet," said Don Luis. "So far, you have followed the logical and natural trend of your thoughts; and that brings you to your present position."

"Yes, yes, I know; but I am showing you the absurdity of your theory. It can't be correct and we can't believe in Marie Fauville's innocence unless we are prepared to suppose an unheard-of thing—that M. Fauville took part in his own murder. Why, it's laughable!"

And he gave a laugh; but it was a forced laugh and did not ring true.

"For after all," he added, "you can't deny that that is where we stand."

"I don't deny it."

"Well?"

"Well, M. Fauville, as you say, took part in his own murder."

This was said in the quietest possible fashion, but with an air of such certainty that no one dreamed of protesting. After the work of deduction and supposition which Don Luis had compelled his hearers to undertake, they found themselves in a corner which it was impossible for them to leave without stumbling against unanswerable objections.

THERE was no longer any doubt about M. Fauville's share in his own death. But of what did that share consist? What part had he played in the tragedy of hatred and murder? Had he played that part, which ended in the sacrifice of his life, voluntarily or under compulsion? Who, when all was said and done, had served as his accomplice or his executioner?

All these questions came crowding upon the minds of M. Desmalions and the others. They thought of nothing but of how to solve them, and Don Luis could feel certain that his solution was accepted beforehand. From that moment he had but to tell his story of what had happened, without fear of contradiction. He did so briefly, after the manner of a succinct report limited to essentials:

"Three months before the crime, M. Fauville wrote a series of letters to one of his friends, M. Langernault, who, as Sergeant Mazeroux will have told you, Monsieur le Préfet, had been dead for several years; a fact of which M. Fauville can not have been ignorant. These letters were mailed, but were intercepted by some means which it is not necessary that we should know for the moment. M. Fauville erased the postmarks and the addresses and inserted the letters in a machine constructed for the purpose, the works of which he regulated so that the first letter should be delivered a fortnight after his death and the others at intervals of ten days.

"At this moment it is certain that his plan was concerted down to the smallest detail. Knowing that Sauverand was in love with his wife, watching Sauverand's movements, he must obviously have noticed that his detested rival used to pass under the windows of the house every Wednesday and that Marie Fauville would go to her window.

"This is a fact of the first importance, one which was exceedingly valuable to me; and it will impress you as being equal to a material proof. Every Wednesday evening, I repeat, Sauverand used to wander around the house. Now note this: first, the crime prepared by M. Fauville was committed on a Wednesday evening; secondly, it was at her husband's express request that Mme. Fauville went out that evening to go to the Opera and to Mme. d'Ersinger's."

Don Luis stopped for a few seconds and then continued:

"Consequently, on the morning of that Wednesday everything was ready, the fatal clock was wound up, the incriminating machinery was working to perfection, and the proofs to come would confirm the immediate proofs which M. Fauville held in reserve. Better still, Monsieur le Préfet, you had received from him a letter in which he told you of the plot hatched against him and he implored your assistance for the morning of the next day; that is to say, for *after his death*.

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"Everything, in short, led him to think that things would go according to the 'hater's' wishes, when something occurred that nearly upset his schemes—the appearance of Inspector Vérot, who had been sent by you, Monsieur le Préfet, to collect particulars about the Mornington heirs. What happened between the two men? Probably no one will ever know. Both are dead; and their secret will not come to life again. But we can at least say for certain that Inspector Vérot was here and took away with him the cake of chocolate on which the teeth of the tiger were seen for the first time and also that Inspector Vérot succeeded, thanks to circumstances with which we are unacquainted, in discovering M. Fauville's projects."

"This we know," explained Don Luis, "because Inspector Vérot said so in his own agonizing words; because it was through him that we learned that the crime was to take place on the following night; and because he had set down his discoveries in a letter which was stolen from him.

"And Fauville knew it also, because, to get rid of the formidable enemy who was thwarting his designs, he poisoned him; because, when the poison was slow in acting, he had the audacity, under a disguise which made him look like Sauverand and which was one day to turn suspicion against Sauverand—he had the audacity and the presence of mind to follow Inspector Vérot to the Café du Pont-Neuf, to purloin the letter of explanation which Inspector Vérot wrote you, to substitute a blank sheet of paper for it and then to ask a passer-by, who might become a witness against Sauverand, the way to the nearest underground station for Neuilly, where Sauverand lived! There's your man, Monsieur le Préfet!"

Don Luis spoke with increasing force, with the ardor that springs from conviction; and his logical and closely argued speech seemed to conjure up the actual truth.

"There's your man, Monsieur le Préfet!" he repeated. "There's your scoundrel! And the situation in which he found himself was such, the fear inspired by Inspector Vérot's possible revelations was such that, before putting into execution the horrible deed which he had planned, he came to the police office to make sure that his victim was no longer alive and had not been able to denounce him.

"You remember the scene, Monsieur le Préfet, the fellow's agitation and fright. 'Tomorrow evening,' he said. Yes, it was for the morrow that he asked for your help, because he knew that everything would be over that same evening and that next day the police would be confronted with a murder, with the two culprits against whom he himself had heaped up the charges, with Marie Fauville whom he had, so to speak, accused in advance. . . .

"That was why Sergeant Mazeroux's visit and mine to his house, at nine o'clock in the evening, embarrassed him so obviously. Who were those intruders? Would they not succeed in shattering his plan? Reflection reassured him, even as we, by our insistence, compelled him to give way.

"After all, what did he care?" asked Perenna.

"His measures were so well taken that no amount of watching could destroy them or even make the watchers aware of them. What was to happen would happen in our presence and unknown to us. Death, summoned by him, would do its work. . . . And the comedy, the tragedy rather, ran its course. Mme. Fauville, whom he was sending to the Opera, came to say good night. Then his servant brought him something to eat, including a dish of apples. Then followed a fit of rage, the agony of the man who is about to die and who fears death, and a whole scene of deceit, in which he showed us his safe and the drab-cloth diary which was supposed to contain the story of the plot. . . . That ended matters.

"Mazeroux and I retired to the hall passage, closing the door after us; and M. Fauville remained alone and free to act. Nothing now could prevent the fulfilment of his wishes. At eleven o'clock in the evening Mme. Fauville—to whom no doubt, in the course of the day, imitating Sauverand's handwriting, he had sent a letter, one of those letters which are always torn up at once, in which Sauverand entreated the poor woman to grant him an interview at the Ranelagh—Mme. Fauville would leave the Opera and, before going to Mme. d'Ersinger's party, would spend an hour not far from the house.

"On the other hand, Sauverand would be performing his usual Wednesday pilgrimage less than half a mile away, in the opposite direction. During this time, the crime would be committed.

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"Both of them would come under the notice of the police, either by M. Fauville's allusions or by the incident at the Café du Pont-Neuf; both of them, moreover, would be incapable either of providing an alibi or of explaining their presence so near the house. Were not both of them bound to be accused and convicted of the crime? . . . In the most unlikely event that some chance should protect them, there was an undeniable proof lying ready to hand in the shape of the apple containing the very marks of Marie Fauville's teeth! And then, a few weeks later, the last and decisive trick, the mysterious arrival at intervals of ten days of the letters denouncing the pair. . . . So everything was settled.

"The smallest details were foreseen with infernal clearness. You remember, Monsieur le Préfet, that turquoise which dropped out of my ring and was found in the safe? There were only four persons who could have seen it and picked it up. M. Fauville was one of them. Well, he was just the one, he, whom we all excepted; and yet it was he who, to cast suspicion upon me and to forestall an interference which he felt would be dangerous, seized the opportunity and placed the turquoise in the safe! . . .

"This time the work was completed. Fate was about to be fulfilled. Between the 'hater' and his victims there was but the distance of one act. The act was performed. M. Fauville died."

Don Luis ceased. His words were followed by a long silence; and he felt certain that the extraordinary story which he had just finished telling met with the absolute approval of his hearers. They did not discuss; they believed. And yet it was the most incredible truth that he was asking them to believe.

M. Desmalions asked one last question.

"You were in that passage with Sergeant Mazeroux. There were detectives outside the house. Admitting that M. Fauville knew that he was to be killed that night and at that very hour of the night, who can have killed him and who can have killed his son? There was no one within these four walls."

"There was M. Fauville."

A SUDDEN clamor of protests arose. The veil was prompt y torn; and the spectacle revealed by Don Luis provoked, in addition to horror, an unforeseen outburst of incredulity and a sort of revolt against the too kindly attention which had been accorded to those explanations. The Prefect of Police expressed the general feeling by exclaiming:

"Enough of words! Enough of theories! However logical they may seem, they lead to absurd conclusions."

"Absurd in appearance, Monsieur le Préfet; but how do we know that M. Fauville's unheard-of conduct is not explained by very natural reasons? Of course, no one dies with a light heart, for the mere pleasure of revenge. But how do we know that M. Fauville, whose extreme emaciation and pallor you must have noted as I did, was not stricken by some mortal illness and that, knowing himself doomed——"

"I repeat, enough of words!" cried the Prefect. "You go only by suppositions. What I want is proofs, a proof, only one. And we are still waiting for it."

"Here it is, Monsieur le Préfet."

"Eh? What's that you say?"

"Monsieur le Préfet, when I removed the chandelier from the plaster that supported it, I found, outside the upper surface of the metal box, a sealed envelope. As the chandelier was placed under the attic occupied by M. Fauville's son, it is evident that M. Fauville was able, by lifting the boards of the floor in his son's room, to reach the top of the machine which he had contrived. This was how, on that last night, he placed this sealed envelope in position, after writing on it the date of the murder, '31 March, 11 P.M.,' and his signature, 'Hippolyte Fauville.' "

M. Desmalions opened the envelope with an eager hand. His first glance at the pages of writing which it contained made him give a start.

"Oh, the villain, the villain!" he said. "How was it possible for such a monster to exist? What a loathsome brute!"

In a jerky voice, which became almost inaudible at times owing to his amazement, he read:

"The end is reached. My hour is striking. Put to sleep by me, Edmond is dead without having been aroused from his unconsciousness by the fire of the poison. My own death-agony is beginning. I am suffering all the tortures of hell. My hand can hardly write these last lines. I suffer, how I suffer! And yet my happiness is unspeakable.

"This happiness dates back to my visit to London, with Edmond, four months ago. Until then I was dragging on the most hideous existence, hiding my hatred of the woman who detested me and who loved another, broken down in health, feeling

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myself already eaten up with an unrelenting disease, and seeing my son grow daily more weak and languid.

"In the afternoon I consulted a great physician, and I no longer had the least doubt left: the malady that was eating into me was cancer. And I knew besides that, like myself, my son Edmond was on the road to the grave, incurably stricken with consumption.

"That same evening I conceived the magnificent idea of revenge. And such a revenge! The most dreadful of accusations made against a man and a woman in love with each other! Prison! The assizes! Penal servitude! The scaffold! And no assistance possible, not a struggle, not a hope! Accumulated proofs, proofs so formidable as to make the innocent themselves doubt their own innocence and remain hopelessly and helplessly dumb! What a revenge! . . . And what a punishment! To be innocent and to struggle vainly against the very facts that accuse you, the very certainty that proclaims you guilty!

"And I prepared everything with a glad heart. Each happy thought, each invention made me shout with laughter. Lord, how merry I was! You would think that cancer hurts: not a bit of it! How can you suffer physical pain when your soul is quivering with delight? Do you think I feel the hideous burning of the poison at this moment?

"I am happy. The death which I have inflicted on myself is the beginning of their torment. Then why live and wait for a natural death, which to them would mean the beginning of their happiness? And, as Edmond had to die, why not save him a lingering illness and give him a death which would double the crime of Marie and Sauverand? . . .

"The end is coming. I had to break off: the pain was too much for me. Now to pull myself together. . . . How silent everything is! Outside the house and in the house are emissaries of the police, watching over my crime. At no great distance Marie, in obedience to my letter, is hurrying to the trysting-place, where her beloved will not come. And the beloved is roaming under the windows where his darling will not appear.

"Oh, the dear little puppets whose strings I pull! Dance! Jump! Skip! Lord, what fun they are! A rope around your neck, sir; and, madam, a rope around yours. Was it not you, sir, who poisoned Inspector Vérot this morning and followed him to the Café du Pont-Neuf, with your grand ebony walking-stick? Why, of course it was! And at night the pretty lady poisons me and poisons her stepson. Prove it? Well, what about this apple, madam, this apple which you did *not* bite into and which, all the same, will be found to bear the marks of your teeth? What fun! Dance! Jump! Skip!

"And the letters! The trick of my letters to the late lamented Langernault! That was my crowning triumph. Oh, the joy of it, when I invented and constructed my little mechanical toy! Wasn't it nicely thought out? Isn't it wonderfully neat and accurate? On the appointed day—*click!* The first letter! And, ten days after—*click!* The second letter! Come, there's no hope for you, my poor friends; you're nicely done for! Dance! Jump! Skip!

"And what amuses me—for I am laughing now—is to think that nobody will know what to make of it. Marie and Sauverand guilty; of that there is not the least doubt. But outside that, absolute mystery!

"Nobody will know, nor ever will know, anything. In a few weeks' time, when the two criminals are irrevocably doomed, when the letters are in the hands of the police, on the 25th, or rather at 3 o'clock on the morning of the 26th of May, an explosion will destroy every trace of my work. The bomb is in its place. A movement entirely independent of the chandelier will explode it at the hour aforesaid.

"I have just laid beside it the drab-cloth manuscript book in which I pretended that I wrote my diary, the vials containing the poison, the needles which I used, an ebony walking-stick, two letters from Inspector Vérot; in short, anything that might save the culprits. Then how can any one know? No, nobody will know, nor ever will know, anything.

"Unless . . . unless some miracle happens . . . unless the bomb leaves the walls standing and the ceiling intact. . . . unless, by some marvel of intelligence and intuition, a man of genius, unraveling the threads which I have tangled, should penetrate to the very heart of the riddle and succeed, after a search lasting for months and months, in discovering this final letter.

"It is for this man that I write, well knowing that he can not exist. But after all, what do I care? Marie and Sauverand will be at the bottom of the abyss by then, dead no doubt, or in any case separated for ever. And I risk nothing by leaving this evidence of my hatred in the hands of chance.

"There, that's finished. I have only to sign. My hand shakes more and more. The sweat is pouring from my forehead in great drops. I am suffering the tortures of the damned, and I am divinely happy! Aha, my friends, you were waiting for my death!

"You, Marie, imprudently let me read in your eyes, which watched me stealthily, all your delight at seeing me so ill! And you were both of you so sure of the future that you had the courage to wait patiently for my death! Well, here it is, my death! Here it is, and there are you, united above my grave, linked together with the hand-cuffs. Marie, be the wife of my friend Sauverand. Sauverand, I bestow my spouse upon you. Be joined together in holy matrimony. Bless you, my children!

"The examining magistrate will draw up the contract and the executioner will read the marriage-service. Oh, the delight of it! I suffer agonies . . . but oh, the delight! What a fine thing is hatred, when it makes death a joy! . . . I am happy in dying. . . . Marie is in prison. . . . Sauverand is weeping in the condemned man's cell. . . . The door opens. . . .

"Oh, horror; the men in black! They walk up to the bed: 'Gaston Sauverand, your appeal is rejected. Courage! Be a man!' Oh, the cold, dark morning . . . The scaffold! . . . It's your turn, Marie, your turn! Would you survive your lover? Sauverand is dead; it's your turn! See, here's a rope for you. . . . Or would you rather have poison? . . . Die, will you, you hussy! Die with your veins on fire . . . as I am doing, I who hate you . . . hate you . . . hate you!"

M. DESMALIONS ceased, amid the silent astonishment of all those present. He had great difficulty in reading the concluding lines, the writing having become almost wholly shapeless and illegible.

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He said in a low voice, as he stared at the paper:

" 'Hippolyte Fauville.' The signature is there. The scoundrel found a last remnant of strength to sign his name clearly. He feared that a doubt might be entertained of his villainy. And indeed how could any one have suspected it?"

And, looking at Don Luis, he added:

"It needed, to solve the mystery, a really exceptional power of insight and gifts to which we must all do homage, to which I do homage. All the explanations which that madman gave have been anticipated in the most accurate and bewildering fashion."

Don Luis bowed and, without replying to the praise bestowed upon him, said:

"You are right, Monsieur le Préfet; he was a madman, and one of the most dangerous kind—the lucid madman who pursues an idea from which nothing will make him turn aside. He pursued it with superhuman tenacity and with all the resources of his fastidious mind, enslaved by the laws of mechanics.

"Another would have killed his victims frankly and brutally. He set his wits to work to kill at a long date, like an experimenter who leaves to time the duty of proving the excellence of his invention. And he succeeded only too well, because the police fell into the trap and because Mme. Fauville is perhaps going to die."

M. Desmalions made a gesture of decision. The whole business, in fact, was past history, on which the police proceedings would throw the necessary light. One fact alone was of importance to the present —the saving of Marie Fauville's life.

"It's true," he said; "we have not a minute to lose. Mme. Fauville must be told without delay. At the same time I will send for the examining magistrate; and the case against her is sure to be dismissed at once."

He swiftly gave orders for continuing the investigations and verifying Don Luis' theories. Then, turning to Perenna:

"Come, monsieur," he said. "It is right that Mme. Fauville should thank her rescuer. Mazeroux, you come too."

THE meeting was over, that meeting in the course of which Don Luis had given the most striking proofs of his genius. Waging war, so to speak, upon the powers beyond the grave, he had forced the dead man to reveal his secret. He disclosed, as if he had been present throughout, the hateful vengeance conceived in the darkness and carried out in the tomb.

M. Desmalions showed all his admiration by his silence and by certain movements of his head. And Perenna took a keen enjoyment in the strange fact that he, who was being hunted down by the police a few hours ago, should now be sitting in a motor-car beside the head of that same force.

Nothing threw into greater relief the masterly manner in which he had conducted the business and the importance which the police attached to the results obtained. The value of his collaboration was such that they were willing to forget the incidents of the last two days. The grudge which Weber bore him was now of no avail against Don Luis Perenna.

M. Desmalions, meanwhile, began briefly to review the new solutions and he concluded by still discussing certain points.

"Yes, that's it . . . There is not the least shadow of a doubt. . . . We agree. . . . It's that and nothing else. Still, one or two things remain obscure. First of all, the mark of the teeth. This, notwithstanding the husband's admission, is a fact which we can not neglect."

"I believe that the explanation is a very simple one, Monsieur le Préfet. I will give it to you as soon as I am able to support it with the necessary proofs."

"Very well. But another question. How is it that Weber, yesterday morning, found that sheet of paper relating to the explosion in Mlle. Levasseur's room?"

"And how was it," added Don Luis, laughing, "that I found there the list of the five dates corresponding with the delivery of the letters?"

"So you are of my opinion?" said M. Desmalions. "The part played by Mlle. Levasseur is at least suspicious."

"I believe that everything will be cleared up, Monsieur le Préfet, and that you need now only question Mme. Fauville and Gaston Sauverand in order to dispel these last obscurities and remove all suspicion from Mlle. Levasseur."

"And then," insisted M. Desmalions, "there is one more fact that strikes me as odd. Hippolyte Fauville does not once mention the Mornington inheritance in his confession. Why? Did he not know of it?

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Are we to suppose that there is no connection, beyond a mere casual coincidence, between the series of crimes and that bequest?"

"There I am entirely of your opinion, Monsieur le Préfet. Hippolyte Fauville's silence as to that bequest perplexes me a little, I confess. But all the same I look upon it as comparatively unimportant. The main thing is Fauville's guilt and the prisoners' innocence."

Don Luis' delight was pure and unbounded. From his point of view, the sinister tragedy was at an end with the discovery of the confession written by Hippolyte Fauville. Anything not explained in those lines would be explained by the details to be supplied by Mme. Fauville, Florence Levasseur and Gaston Sauverand. He himself had lost all interest in the matter.

The car drew up at Saint-Lazare, the wretched, sordid old prison which is still waiting to be pulled down.

The Prefect jumped out. The door was opened at once.

"Is the Prison Governor there?" he asked. "Quick, send for him; it's urgent."

Then, unable to wait, he at once hastened toward the corridors leading to the infirmary and, as he reached the first floor landing, came up against the Governor himself.

"Mme. Fauville," he said without waste of time. "I want to see her——"

But he stopped short when he saw the expression of consternation on the Prison Governor's face.

"Well, what is it?" he asked. "What's the matter?"

"Why, haven't you heard, Monsieur le Préfet?" stammered the Governor. "I telephoned to the office, you know——"

"Speak! What is it?"

"Mme. Fauville died this morning. She managed somehow to take poison."

M. Desmalions seized the Governor by the arm and ran to the infirmary, followed by Perenna and Mazeroux.

He saw Marie Fauville lying on a bed in one of the rooms. Her pale face and her shoulders were stained with brown patches, similar to those which had marked the bodies of Inspector Vérot, Hippolyte Fauville and his son Edmond.

Greatly upset, the Prefect murmured—

"But the poison . . . where did it come from?"

"This vial and syringe were found under her pillow, Monsieur le Prefét."

"Under her pillow? But how did they get there? How did they reach her? Who gave them to her?"

"We don't know yet, Monsieur le Préfet."

M. Desmalions looked at Don Luis. So Hippolyte Fauville's suicide had not put an end to the series of crimes! His action had done more than aim at Marie's death by the hand of the law; it had now driven her to take poison! Was it possible? Was it admissible that the dead man's revenge should still continue in the same automatic and anonymous manner?

Or rather . . . or rather was there not some other mysterious will which was secretly and as audaciously carrying on Hippolyte Fauville's diabolical work?

TWO days later came a fresh sensation: Gaston Sauverand was found dying in his cell. He had had the courage to strangle himself with his bed sheet. All efforts to restore him to life were vain.

On the table near him lay a half dozen newspaper-clippings, which had been passed to him by an unknown hand. All of them told the news of Marie Fauville's death.

CHAPTER XVII

THE HEIR TO THE HUNDRED MILLIONS

ON THE fourth evening after the tragic events related, an old cab-driver, almost entirely hidden in a huge great-coat, rang at Perenna's door and sent up a letter to Don Luis. He was at once shown into the study on the first floor. Hardly taking time to throw off his great-coat, he rushed at Don Luis.

"It's all up with you this time, chief!" he exclaimed. "This is no moment for joking; pack up your trunks and be off as quick as you can!"

Don Luis, who sat quietly smoking in an easy chair, answered:

"Which will you have, Mazeroux—a cigar or a cigarette?"

Mazeroux at once grew indignant.

"But look here, chief, don't you read the papers?"

"Worse luck!"

"In that case, the situation must appear as

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clear to you as it does to me and everybody else. During the last three days, since the double suicide or rather the double murder of Marie Fauville and her cousin Gaston Sauverand, there hasn't been a newspaper but has said this kind of thing: 'And, now that M. Fauville, his son, his wife and his cousin Gaston Sauverand are dead, there's nothing standing between Don Luis Perenna and the Mornington inheritance!'

"Do you understand what that means? Of course, people speak of the explosion on the Boulevard Suchet and of Fauville's posthumous revelations; and they are disgusted with that dirty brute of a Fauville; and they don't know how to praise your cleverness enough. But there is one fact that forms the main subject of every conversation and every discussion.

"Now that the three branches of the Roussel family are extinct, who remains? Don Luis Perenna. In default of the natural heirs, who inherits the property? Don Luis Perenna."

"Lucky dog!"

"That's what people are saying, chief. They say that this series of murders and atrocities can not be the effect of chance coincidences, but on the contrary points to the existence of an all-powerful will which began with the murder of Cosmo Mornington and ended with the capture of the hundred millions. And, to give a name to that will, they pitch on the nearest—that of the extraordinary, glorious, ill-famed, bewildering, mysterious, omnipotent and ubiquitous person who was Cosmo Mornington's intimate friend and who, from the beginning, has controlled events and pieced them together, accusing and acquitting people, getting them arrested and helping them to escape."

"They say," he went on hurriedly, "that he manages the whole business and that, if he works it in accordance with his interests, there are a hundred millions waiting for him at the finish. And this person is Don Luis Perenna—in other words, Arsène Lupin, the man with the unsavory reputation, whom it would be madness not to think of in connection with so colossal a job."

"Thank you!"

"That's what they say, chief; I'm only telling you. As long as Mme. Fauville and Gaston Sauverand were alive, people did not give much thought to your claims as residuary legatee. But both of them die. Then, you see, people can't help remarking the really surprising persistence with which luck looks after Don Luis Perenna's interests.

"You know the legal maxim: *fecit cui prodest.* Who benefits by the disappearance of all the Roussel heirs? Don Luis Perenna."

"The scoundrel!"

"The scoundrel: that's the word which Weber goes roaring out all along the passages of the police office and the criminal investigation department. You are the scoundrel and Florence Levasseur is your accomplice. And hardly any one dares protest.

"The Prefect of Police? What is the use of his defending you, of his remembering that you have saved his life twice over and rendered invaluable services to the police which he is the first to appreciate? What is the use of his going to the Prime Minister, though we all know that Valenglay protects you?

"There are others besides the Prefect of Police! There are others besides the Prime Minister! There's the whole of the detective office, there's the Public Prosecutor's staff, there's the examining magistrate, the press and, above all, public opinion, which has to be satisfied and which calls for and expects a culprit. That culprit is yourself or Florence Levasseur. Or rather it's you and Florence Levasseur."

Don Luis did not move a muscle of his face. Mazeroux waited a moment longer. Then, receiving no reply, he made a gesture of despair.

"Chief, do you know what you are compelling me to do? To betray my duty! Well, let me tell you this: tomorrow morning you will receive a summons to appear before the examining magistrate. At the end of your examination, whatever questions may have been put to you and whatever you may have answered, you will be taken straight to the lockup. The warrant is signed. That is what your enemies have done."

"The devil!"

"And that's not all. Weber, who is burning to take his revenge, has asked for permission to watch your house from this day onward, so that you may not slip away as Florence Levasseur did. He will be here with his men in an hour's time. What do you say to that, chief?"

Without abandoning his careless attitude, Don Luis beckoned to Mazeroux.

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"Sergeant, just look under that sofa between the windows."

Don Luis was serious. Mazeroux instinctively obeyed. Under the sofa was a portmanteau.

"Sergeant, in ten minutes, when I have told my servants to go to bed, carry the portmanteau to 143 *bis*, Rue de Rivoli, where I have taken a small flat under the name of M. Lecocq."

"What for, chief? What does it mean?"

"It means that, having no trustworthy person to carry that portmanteau for me, I have been waiting for your visit for the last three days."

"Why, but——" stammered Mazeroux, in his confusion.

"'Why, but'—what?"

"Had you made up your mind to clear out?"

"Of course I had! But why hurry? The reason I originally obtained for you a place in the detective office was that I might know what was being plotted against me. Since you tell me that I'm in danger, I shall clear out."

And, as Mazeroux looked at him with increasing bewilderment, he tapped the sergeant on the shoulder and said severely:

"You see, sergeant, that it was not worth while to disguise yourself as a cab-driver and betray your duty. You should never betray your duty, sergeant. Ask your own conscience; I am sure that it will judge you according to your deserts."

DON LUIS had spoken the truth. Recognizing how greatly the deaths of Marie Fauville and Sauverand had altered the situation, he considered it wise to move to a place of safety. His excuse for not doing so before was that he hoped to receive news of Florence Levasseur either by letter or by telephone. As the girl persisted in keeping silence, there was no reason why Don Luis should risk an arrest which the course of events made extremely probable.

And in fact his anticipations were correct. Next morning Mazeroux came to the little flat in the Rue de Rivoli, looking very spry.

"You've had a narrow escape, chief. Weber heard this morning that the bird had flown. He's simply furious. And you must confess that the tangle is getting worse and worse. They're utterly at a loss at headquarters. They don't even know how to set about prosecuting Florence Levasseur.

"You must have read about it in the papers. The examining magistrate maintains that, as Fauville committed suicide and killed his son Edmond, Florence Levasseur has nothing to do with the matter. In his opinion the case is closed on that side. Well, he's a good one, the examining magistrate! What about Gaston Sauverand's murder? Isn't it as clear as daylight that Florence had a hand in it, as well as in all the rest?

"Wasn't it in her room, in a volume of Shakespeare, that documents were found relating to M. Fauville's arrangements about the letters and the explosion? And then——"

Mazeroux interrupted himself, frightened by the look in Don Luis' eyes, and realizing that the chief was fonder of the girl than ever. Guilty or not, she inspired him with the same passion.

"All right," said Mazeroux. "We'll say no more about it. The future will bear me out; you'll see."

THE days passed. Mazeroux called as often as possible, or else telephoned to Don Luis all the details of the two inquiries that were being pursued at Saint-Lazare and at the Santé Prison.

Vain inquiries, as we know. While Don Luis' statements relating to the electric chandelier and the automatic distribution of the mysterious letters were found to be correct, the investigation failed to reveal anything about the two suicides.

At most, it was ascertained that, before his arrest, Sauverand had tried to enter into correspondence with Marie through one of the tradesmen supplying the infirmary. Were they to suppose that the vial of poison and the hypodermic syringe had been introduced by the same means? It was impossible to prove; and on the other hand it was impossible to discover how the newspaper-clippings telling of Marie's suicide had found their way into Gaston Sauverand's cell.

And then the original mystery still remained, the unfathomable mystery of the marks of teeth in the apple. M. Fauville's posthumous confession acquitted Marie. And yet it was undoubtedly Marie's teeth that had marked the apple. The teeth that had been called the teeth of the tiger were certainly hers. Well, then!

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In short, as Mazeroux said, everybody was groping in the dark, so much so that the Prefect, who was called upon by the will to assemble the Mornington heirs at a date not less than three nor more than four months after the testator's decease, suddenly decided that the meeting should take place in the course of the following week and fixed it for the ninth of June.

He hoped in this way to put an end to an exasperating case in which the police displayed nothing but uncertainty and confusion. They would decide about the inheritance according to circumstances and then close the proceedings. And gradually people would cease to talk about the wholesale slaughter of the Mornington heirs; and the mystery of the teeth of the tiger would be gradually forgotten.

It was strange, but these last days, which were restless and feverish like all the days that come before great battles—and every one felt that this last meeting meant a great battle—were spent by Don Luis in an armchair on his balcony in the Rue de Rivoli, where he sat quietly smoking cigarettes or blowing soap-bubbles which the wind carried toward the garden of the Tuileries.

Mazeroux could not get over it.

"Chief, you astound me! How calm and careless you look!"

"I am calm and careless, Alexandre."

"But what do you mean? Doesn't the case interest you? Don't you intend to revenge Mme. Fauville and Sauverand? You are openly accused—and you sit here blowing soap-bubbles!"

"There's no more delightful pastime, Alexandre."

"Shall I tell you what I think, chief? You've discovered the solution of the mystery!"

"Perhaps I have, Alexandre, and perhaps I haven't."

Nothing seemed to excite Don Luis. Hours and hours passed; and he did not stir from his balcony. The sparrows now came and ate the crumbs which he threw to them. It really seemed as if the case was coming to an end for him and as if everything was turning out perfectly.

But, on the day of the meeting, Mazeroux entered with a letter in his hand and a scared look on his face.

"This is for you, chief. It was addressed to me, but with an envelope inside it in your name. How do you explain that?"

"Quite easily, Alexandre. The enemy is aware of our cordial relations; and, as he does not know where I am staying——"

"What enemy?"

"I'll tell you tomorrow evening."

Don Luis opened the envelope and read the following words, written in red ink:

> There's still time, Lupin. Retire from the contest. If not, it means your death, too. When you think that your object is attained, when your hand is raised against me and you utter words of triumph, at that same moment the ground will open beneath your feet. The place of your death is chosen. The snare is laid. Beware, Lupin!

Don Luis smiled.

"Good," he said. "Things are taking shape."

"Do you think so, chief?"

"I do. And who gave you the letter?"

"Ah, we've been lucky for once, chief! The policeman to whom it was handed happened to live at Les Ternes, next door to the bearer of the letter. He knows the fellow well. It was a stroke of luck, wasn't it?"

Don Luis sprang from his seat, radiant with delight.

"What do you mean? Out with it! You know who it is?"

"The chap's an indoor servant employed at a nursing-home in the Avenue des Ternes."

"Let's go there. We've no time to lose."

"Splendid, chief! You're yourself again."

"Why, of course! As long as there was nothing to do I was waiting for this evening, and resting, for I can see that the fight will be tremendous. But as the enemy has blundered at last, as he's given me a trail to go upon, there's no need to wait and I'll get ahead of him. Have at the tiger, Mazeroux!"

IT WAS one o'clock in the afternoon when Don Luis and Mazeroux arrived at the nursing-home in the Avenue des Ternes. A manservant opened the door. Mazeroux nudged Don Luis. The man was doubtless the bearer of the letter. And, in reply to the sergeant's questions, he made no difficulty about saying that he had been to the police office that morning.

"By whose orders?" asked Mazeroux.

"The Mother Superior's."

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"The Mother Superior?"

"Yes; the home includes a private hospital, which is managed by nuns."

"Could we speak to the Superior?"

"Certainly, but not now; she has gone out."

"When will she be in?"

"Oh, she may be back at any time."

The man showed them into the waiting-room, where they spent over an hour. They were greatly puzzled. What did the intervention of that nun mean? What part was she playing in the case?

People came in and were taken to the patients whom they had called to see. Others went out. There were also sisters moving silently to and fro, and nurses dressed in their long white overalls belted at the waist.

"We're not doing any good here, chief," whispered Mazeroux.

"What's your hurry? Is your sweetheart waiting for you?"

"We're wasting our time."

"I'm not wasting mine. The meeting at the Prefect's is not till five."

"What did you say? You're joking, chief! You surely don't intend to go to it."

"Why not?"

"Why not? Well, the warrant——"

"The warrant? A scrap of paper!"

"A scrap of paper which will become a serious matter if you force the police to act. Your presence will be looked upon as a provocation——"

"And my absence as a confession. A gentleman who comes into a hundred millions does not lie low on the day of the windfall. So I must attend that meeting, lest I should forfeit my claim. And attend it I will."

"Chief . . . "

A stifled cry was heard in front of them; and a woman, a nurse, who was passing through the room, at once started running, lifted a curtain and disappeared.

Don Luis arose, hesitating, not knowing what to do. Then, after four or five seconds of indecision, he suddenly rushed to the curtain and down a corridor, came up against a large leather-padded door which had just closed and wasted more time in stupidly fumbling at it with shaking hands.

When he had opened it he found himself at the foot of a back staircase. Should he go up it? On the right, the same staircase ran down to the basement. He went down it, entered a kitchen and, seizing hold of the cook, said to her in an angry voice—

"Has a nurse just gone out this way?"

"Do you mean Nurse Gertrude, the new one?"

"Yes, yes, quick! She's wanted upstairs."

"Who wants her?"

"Oh, hang it all, can't you tell me which way she went?"

"Through that door over there."

Don Luis darted away, crossed a little hall and rushed out on to the Avenue des Ternes.

"Well, here's a pretty race!" cried Mazeroux, joining him.

Don Luis stood scanning the avenue. A motor-bus was starting on the little square hard by, the Place Saint-Ferdinand.

"She's inside it," he declared. "This time I sha'n't let her go."

He hailed a taxi.

"Follow that motor-bus, driver, at fifty yards' distance."

"Is it Florence Levasseur?" asked Mazeroux.

"Yes."

"A nice thing!" growled the sergeant. And, yielding to a sudden outburst: "But look here, chief, don't you see? Surely you're not so blind as all that!"

Don Luis made no reply.

"But chief, Florence Levasseur's presence in the nursing-home proves as clearly as A-B-C that it was she who told the man-servant to bring me that threatening letter for you! There's not a doubt about it; Florence Levasseur is managing the whole business.

"You know it as well as I do. Confess! It's possible that, during the last ten days, you've brought yourself, for love of that woman, to look upon her as innocent in spite of the overwhelming proofs against her. But today the truth hits you in the eye. I feel it, I'm sure of it. Isn't it so, chief? I'm right, am I not? You see it for yourself?"

This time Don Luis did not protest. With a drawn face and set eyes he watched the motor-bus, which at that moment was standing still at the corner of the Boulevard Haussmann.

"Stop!" he shouted to the driver.

The girl alighted. It was easy to recognize Florence Levasseur under her nurse's uniform. She cast around her eyes as if to make sure that she was not being followed,

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and then took a cab and drove down the boulevard and the Rue de la Pépinière to the Gare Saint-Lazare.

Don Luis saw her from a distance climbing the steps that run up from the Cour de Rome; and, on following her, caught sight of her again at the ticket-office at the end of the waiting-hall.

"Quick, Mazeroux!" he said. "Get out your detective-card and ask the clerk what ticket she's taken. Run, before another passenger comes."

Mazeroux hurried and questioned the ticket-clerk and returned.

"Second class for Rouen."

"Take one for yourself."

Mazeroux did so. They found that there was an express due to start in a minute. When they reached the platform Florence was stepping into a compartment in the middle of the train.

The engine whistled.

"Get in," said Don Luis, hiding himself as best he could. "Telegraph to me from Rouen; and I'll join you this evening. Above all, keep your eyes on her. Don't let her slip between your fingers. She's very clever, you know."

"But why don't you come yourself, chief? It would be much better——"

"Out of the question. The train doesn't stop before Rouen; and I couldn't be back till this evening. The meeting at the Prefect's is at five o'clock."

"And you insist on going?"

"More than ever. There, jump in!"

He pushed the sergeant into one of the end carriages. The train started and soon disappeared in the tunnel.

Then Don Luis flung himself on a bench in a waiting-room and remained there for two hours, pretending to read the newspapers. But his eyes wandered and his mind was haunted by the agonizing question that once more forced itself upon him: Was Florence guilty or not?

IT WAS five o'clock exactly when the executors named in Cosmo Mornington's will—Major Comte d'Astrignac, Maître Lepertuis, and the Secretary of the American Embassy—were shown into the office of their fellow-executor, M. Desmalions. At the same mo ment some one entered the messengers' room and handed in his card.

The messenger on duty glanced at the pasteboard, turned his head quickly toward a group of men talking in a corner and then asked the newcomer—

"Have you an appointment, sir?"

"It's not necessary. Just say that I'm here—Don Luis Perenna."

A kind of electric shock ran through the little group in the corner; and one of the persons forming it came forward. It was Weber, the deputy chief detective.

The two men looked each other straight in the eyes. Don Luis smiled amiably. Weber was livid; he shook in every limb and was plainly striving to contain himself.

Near him stood a couple of journalists and four detectives.

"By Jove, the fellows are there for me!" thought Don Luis. "But their confusion shows that they did not believe that I should have the cheek to come. Are they going to arrest me?"

Weber did not move, but in the end his face expressed a certain satisfaction, as if he were saying—

"I've got you this time, my fine fellow, and you sha'n't escape me."

The office messenger returned and without a word led the way for Don Luis. Perenna passed in front of Weber with the politest of bows, bestowed a friendly little nod on the detectives, and entered.

The Comte d'Astrignac hurried up to him at once, with hands outstretched, thus showing that all the tittle-tattle in no way affected the esteem in which he continued to hold Private Perenna of the Foreign Legion. But the Prefect of Police maintained an attitude of reserve which was very significant. He went on turning over the papers which he was examining and conversed in a low voice with the solicitor and the American Secretary of Embassy.

Don Luis thought to himself:

"My dear Lupin, there's some one going to leave this room with the bracelets on his wrists. If it's not the real culprit, it'll be you, my poor old chap."

And he remembered the early part of the case, when he was in the workroom at Fauville's house, before the magistrates, and had either to deliver the criminal to justice or to incur the penalty of immediate arrest. In the same way, from the start to the finish of the struggle, he had been obliged, while fighting the invisible enemy, to expose himself to the attacks of the law

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with no means of defending himself except by indispensable victories.

Harassed by constant onslaughts, never out of danger, he had successively hurried to their deaths Marie Fauville and Gaston Sauverand, two innocent people sacrificed to the cruel laws of war. Was he at last about to fight the real enemy, or would he himself succumb at the decisive moment?

He rubbed his hands with such a cheerful gesture that M. Desmalions could not help looking at him. Don Luis wore the radiant air of a man who is experiencing a pure joy and who is preparing to taste others even greater.

The Prefect of Police remained silent for a moment, as if asking himself what that devil of a fellow could be so pleased with; then he fumbled through his papers once more and, in the end, said:

"We have met again, gentlemen, as we did two months ago, to come to a definite conclusion about the Mornington inheritance. Señor Caceres, the attaché of the Peruvian Legation, will not be here. I have received a telegram from Italy to tell me that Señor Caceres is seriously ill. However, his presence was not indispensable. There is no one lacking, therefore . . . except those, alas, whose claims this meeting would gladly have sanctioned; that is to say, Cosmo Mornington's heirs."

"There is one other person absent, Monsieur le Préfet."

M. Desmalions looked up. The speaker was Don Luis. The Prefect hesitated and then decided to ask him to explain.

"Whom do you mean? What person?"

"The murderer of the Mornington heirs."

This time again Don Luis compelled attention and, in spite of the resistance which he encountered, obliged the others to take notice of his presence and to yield to his ascendency. Whatever happened, they had to listen to him. Whatever happened, they had to discuss with him things which seemed incredible, but which were possible because he put them into words.

"Monsieur le Préfet," he asked, "will you allow me to set forth the facts of the matter as it now stands? They will form a natural sequel and conclusion of the interview which we had after the explosion on the Boulevard Suchet."

M. Desmalions' silence gave Don Luis leave to speak. He at once continued:

"It will not take long, Monsieur le Préfet. It will not take long for two reasons: first, because M. Fauville's confessions remain at our disposal and we know definitely the monstrous part which he played; and secondly, because, after all, the truth, however complicated it may seem, is really very simple.

"It all lies in the objection which you, Monsieur le Préfet, made to me on leaving the wrecked house on the Boulevard Suchet. 'How is it,' you asked, 'that the Mornington inheritance is not once mentioned in Hippolyte Fauville's confession?' It all lies in that, Monsieur le Préfet. Hippolyte Fauville did not say a word about the inheritance; and the reason evidently is that he did not know of it.

"And the reason why Gaston Sauverand was able to tell me his whole sensational story without making the least allusion to the inheritance was that the inheritance played no sort of part in Gaston Sauverand's story. He took new nothing of it before those events, any more than Marie Fauville did, or Florence Levasseur. There is no denying the fact: Hippolyte Fauville was guided by revenge, and by revenge alone. If not, why should he have acted as he did, seeing that Cosmo Mornington's millions reverted to him by the fullest of rights? Besides, if he had wished to enjoy those millions, he would not have begun by killing himself.

"One thing, therefore, is certain: the inheritance in no way affected Hippolyte Fauville's resolves or actions. And nevertheless, one after the other, with inflexible regularity, as if they had been struck down in the very order called for by the terms of the Mornington inheritance, they all disappeared: Cosmo Mornington, then Hippolyte Fauville, then Edmond Fauville, then Marie Fauville, then Gaston Sauverand. First, the possessor of the fortune; next, all those whom he had appointed his legatees; and, I repeat, in the very order in which the will enabled them to lay claim to the fortune!

"Is it not strange?" asked Perenna. "And are we not bound to suppose that there was a controlling mind at the back of it all? Are we not bound to admit that the formidable contest was influenced by that inheritance and that, above the hatred and jealousy of the loathsome Fauville, there loomed a being endowed with even more tremendous energy, pursuing a tangible

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aim and driving to their deaths, one by one, like so many numbered victims, all the unconscious actors in the tragedy of which he tied, and of which he is now untying, the threads?"

Don Luis leaned forward and continued earnestly:

"Monsieur le Préfet, the public instinct so thoroughly agrees with me, a section of the police with M. Weber, the deputy chief detective at its head, argues in a manner so exactly identical with my own, that the existence of that being is at once confirmed in every mind. There had to be some one to act as the controlling brain, to provide the will and the energy. That some one was myself. After all, why not? Did not I possess the condition which was indispensable to make any one interested in the murders? Was I not Cosmo Mornington's heir?

"I will not defend myself. It may be that outside interference, it may be that circumstances will oblige you, Monsieur le Préfet, to take unjustifiable measures against me; but I will not insult you by believing for one second that you can imagine the man whose acts you have been able to judge for the last two months capable of such crimes. And yet the public instinct is right in accusing me.

"Apart from Hippolyte Fauville, there is necessarily a criminal; and that criminal is necessarily Cosmo Mornington's heir. As I am not the man, another heir of Cosmo Mornington exists. It is he whom I accuse, Monsieur le Préfet.

"There is something more than a dead man's will in the wicked business that is being enacted before us. We thought for a time that there was only that; but there is something more. I have not been fighting a dead man all the time; more than once I have felt the very breath of life strike against my face. More than once I have felt the teeth of the tiger seeking to tear me.

The dead man did much, but he did not do everything. And, even then, was he alone in doing what he did? Was the being of whom I speak merely one who executed his orders? Or was he also the accomplice who helped him in his scheme? I do not know. But he certainly continued a work which he perhaps began by inspiring and which in any case he turned to his own profit, resolutely completed and carried out to the very end. And he did so because he knew of Cosmo Mornington's will. It is he whom I accuse, Monsieur le Préfet.

"I accuse him at the very least of that part of the crimes and felonies which cannot be attributed to Hippolyte Fauville. I accuse him of breaking open the drawer of the desk in which Maître Lepertuis, Cosmo Mornington's solicitor, had put his client's will. I accuse him of entering Cosmo Mornington's room and substituting a vial containing a toxic fluid for one of the vials of glycero-phosphate which Cosmo Mornington used for his hypodermic injections. I accuse him of playing the part of a doctor who came to certify Cosmo Mornington's death and of delivering a false certificate. I accuse him of supplying Hippolyte Fauville with the poison which killed successively Inspector Vérot, Edmond Fauville, and Hippolyte Fauville himself.

"I accuse him of arming and turning against me the hand of Gaston Sauverand, who, acting under his advice and his instructions, tried three times to take my life and ended by causing the death of my chauffeur. I accuse him of profiting by the relations which Gaston Sauverand had established with the infirmary in order to communicate with Marie Fauville and of arranging for Marie Fauville to receive the hypodermic syringe and the vial of poison with which the poor woman was able to carry out her plans of suicide."

Perenna paused to note the effect of these charges. Then he went on:

"I accuse him of conveying to Gaston Sauverand, by some unknown means, the newspaper-clippings about Marie Fauville's death and at the same time foreseeing the inevitable results of his act. To sum up, therefore, without mentioning his share in the other crimes—the death of Inspector Vérot, the death of my chauffeur—I accuse him of killing Cosmo Mornington, Edmond Fauville, Hippolyte Fauville, Marie Fauville and Gaston Sauverand; in plain words, of killing all those who stood between the millions and himself. These last words, Monsieur le Préfet, will tell you clearly what I have in my mind.

"When a man does away with five of his fellow creatures in order to secure a certain number of millions, it means that he is convinced that this proceeding will positively and mathematically insure his entering

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into possession of the millions. In short, when a man does away with a millionaire and his four successive heirs, it means that he himself is the millionaire's fifth heir. The man will be here in a moment."

"What!"

It was a spontaneous exclamation on the part of the Prefect of Police, who was forgetting the whole of Don Luis Perenna's powerful and closely reasoned argument and thinking only of the stupefying apparition which Don Luis announced. Don Luis replied:

"Monsieur le Préfet, his visit is the logical outcome of my accusations. Remember that Cosmo Mornington's will explicitly states that no heir's claim will be valid unless he is present at today's meeting."

"And suppose he does not come?" asked the Prefect, thus showing that Don Luis' conviction had gradually got the better of his doubts.

"He will come, Monsieur le Préfet. If not, there would have been no sense in all this business. Limited to the crimes and other actions of Hippolyte Fauville, it could be looked upon as the preposterous work of a madman. Continued to the deaths of Marie Fauville and Gaston Sauverand, it demands, as its inevitable outcome, the appearance of a person who, as the last descendant of the Roussels of Saint-Etienne and consequently as Cosmo Mornington's absolute heir, taking precedence of myself, will come to claim the hundred millions which he has won by means of his incredible audacity."

"And suppose he does not come?" M. Desmalions once more exclaimed, in a more vehement tone.

"Then, Monsieur le Préfet, you may take it that I am the culprit; and you have only to arrest me. This day, between five and six o'clock, you will see before you, in this room, the person who killed the Mornington heirs. It is, humanly speaking, impossible that this should not be so. Consequently the law will be satisfied in any circumstances. He or I: the position is quite simple."

M. DESMALIONS was silent. He gnawed his mustache thoughtfully and walked around and around the table, within the narrow circle formed by the others. It was obvious that objections to the supposition were springing up in his mind. In the end he muttered, as if speaking to himself:

"No, no! For, after all, how are we to explain that the man should have waited until now to claim his rights?"

"An accident, perhaps, Monsieur le Préfet; an obstacle of some kind. Or else—one can never tell—the perverse longing for a more striking sensation. And remember, Monsieur le Préfet, how minutely and subtly the whole business was worked. Each event took place at the very moment fixed by Hippolyte Fauville. Can not we take it that his accomplice is pursuing this method to the end, and that he will not reveal himself until the last minute?"

M. Desmalions exclaimed with a sort of anger:

"No, no, and again no! It is not possible. If a creature monstrous enough to commit such a series of murders exists, he will not be such a fool as to deliver himself into our hands."

"Monsieur le Préfet, he does not know the danger that threatens him if he comes here, because no one has even contemplated the theory of his existence. Besides, what risk does he run?"

"What risk? Why, if he has really committed those murders——"

"He has not committed them, Monsieur le Préfet. He has *caused* them to be committed, which is a different thing. And you now see where the man's unsuspected strength lies! He does not act in person. From the day when the truth appeared to me, I have succeeded in gradually discovering his means of action, in laying bare the machinery which he controls, the tricks which he employs. He does not act in person. There you have his method. You will find that it is the same throughout the series of murders.

"In appearance, Cosmo Mornington died of the results of a carelessly administered injection. In reality, it was this man who caused the injection to prove fatal. In appearance, Inspector Vérot was killed by Hippolyte Fauville. In reality, it must have been this man who contrived the murder by pointing out the necessity to Fauville and, so to speak, guiding his hand. And in the same way, in appearance Fauville killed his son and committed suicide; Marie Fauville committed suicide; Gaston Sauverand committed suicide. In reality, it was this man who wanted them dead, who

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prompted them to commit murder and suicide, and who supplied them with the means of death.

"There you have the method and there, Monsieur le Préfet, you have the man." And, in a lower voice, that contained a sort of apprehension, he added, "I confess that never before, in the course of a life that has been full of strange meetings, have I encountered a more terrifying person, acting with more devilish ability or greater psychological insight."

His words created an ever increasing sensation among his hearers. They really saw that invisible being. He took shape in their imaginations. They waited for him to arrive. Twice Don Luis had turned to the door and listened. And his action did more than anything else to conjure up the image of the man who was coming.

M. Desmalions said—

"Whether he acted in person or caused others to act, the law, once it has hold of him, will know how to——"

"The law will find it no easy matter, Monsieur le Préfet! A man of his powers and resource must have foreseen everything, even his arrest, even the accusation of which he would be the subject; and there is little to be brought against him but moral charges, without proofs."

"Then you think——"

"I think, Monsieur le Préfet, that the thing will be to accept his explanations as quite natural and not to show any distrust. What you want is to know who he is. Later on, before long, you will be able to unmask him."

The Prefect of Police continued to walk around the table. Major d'Astrignac kept his eyes fixed on Perenna, whose coolness amazed him. The solicitor and the Secretary of Embassy seemed greatly excited. In fact nothing could be more sensational than the thought that filled all their minds. Was the abominable murderer about to appear before them?

"Silence!" said the Prefect, stopping his walk.

Some one had crossed the anteroom.

There was a knock at the door.

"Come in!"

The office messenger entered, carrying a card-tray. On the tray was a letter; and in addition there was one of those printed slips on which it is customary for the caller to write his name and the object of his visit.

M. Desmalions hastened toward the messenger. He hesitated a moment before taking up the slip. He was very pale. Then he glanced at it quickly.

"Oh!" he said with a start.

He looked toward Don Luis, reflected, and then, taking the letter, he said to the messenger—

"Is the bearer outside?"

"In the anteroom, Monsieur le Préfet."

"Show the caller in when I ring."

The messenger left the room.

M. Desmalions stood in front of his desk without moving. For the second time Don Luis met his eyes; and a feeling of perturbation came over him. What was happening?

With a sharp movement, the Prefect of Police opened the envelope which he held in his hand, unfolded the letter and began to read it.

The others watched his every gesture, watched the least change of expression on his face. Were Perenna's predictions about to be fulfilled? Was a fifth heir putting in his claim?

TO BE CONCLUDED.

AN OPEN SECRET

By CHARLES CAMPBELL JONES

PLACE can not make it for many or few;
Time doesn't hide it in old years or new;
Who reads the secret may claim it as his—
Adventure is where the adventurer is.

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THE LOG OF A BEACH COMBER

AS RELATED BY RICHARD T. JACOBSON TO CHARLES NEVILLE BUCK

SINCE those young days when I transferred my literary affections from G. A. Henty to Robert Louis Stevenson, my imagination has been fired with one phrase which stuck tantalizingly in my memory. It seemed to summarize a sort of colorful vagabondage and brotherhood of tatterdemalion adventure. Yet the phrase describes the most desperate condition to which a traveler can come. It is this: "On the beach."

Since that period of story-book conceptions I have been out and come back. Beaches have been my habitations. The phrase no longer allures with the vague glamour of adventure. In stripping those illusions I have acquired actualities and memories, many of which I would willingly efface, but at least I can speak as one who has had his knowledge at first hand. It was not by proxy that I "hit the beach" at Antofagasta, Valparaiso, Callao, Iquique, Sydney, Auckland and a dozen other points on both sides of the Pacific. It was not by proxy that I lived alone among the Amaryan Indians in the hinterland of Bolivia—though that was combing the beach pretty far inland—and it was decidedly in the first person that I lay for eight months in a Peruvian prison, falsely charged with the murder of a fellow derelict. To my own people in these far countries I was a purposeless outcast, except at those occasional periods when some golden enterprise resulted in a "killing" and when for a brief time I could rise above the submerging waters of vagabondage and return to cities where white men and white women lived in that decency which I had known in boyhood.

Even in those favored intervals when, shaved and dressed again in the semblance of a surrendered gentility, I could mingle with what had once been my kind, I could not escape the hungry glances of the men who were still "on the beach;" whose kind I had become.

Tomorrow might find me again tramping water-front streets, fraternizing once more with my colleagues in "the Legion of the Lost Ones, in the Cohorts of the Damned." For once a man has been bitten with the virus of the wanderlust and "hit the beach," his fate is usually irrevocable. His moments of wealth also will be moments of wasting, and tomorrow will dawn on the derelict. If we were often outcasts to our own sort, to the natives we were always Gringos, only the designation was rarely used without qualification, and the qualification was rarely nice.

But it is for me to draw the picture of my experiences, or some part of them, and for the hearer to draw the moral. I shall not go into my initial years of semi-respectable adventure after I left my home in Kentucky, except for a few prefatory sentences to show when and where I reached that stage of downward coursing which comes at last to the beach.

On or about August 18, 1906, I left Tacoma, Washington, to see what Vancouver was like. I had no very definite idea of what I meant to do with Tacoma when I had attained it, but having arrived I spent eighteen months there in varied commercial pursuits, which instead of opening a future brought me conclusively to the decision that I had only a past.

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A WATER-FRONT BOARDING-HOUSE

I FOUND myself at last in one of those water-front boarding-houses which a man shuns as he would shun a plague-center until the day arrives when he seeks refuge inside its door. That day marks his enlistment in the world-wide army of beach combers. This house was owned by a negro, and I may say, in passing, that it is surprising how many of these establishments from Canada to the southern coast of Chile are operated by American negroes. Perhaps that is one reason why the American white man, particularly the man reared south of the Mason and Dixon Line, regards them with such distaste.

But there are other reasons. The proprietor of such an establishment has no interest in a prospective guest until he has reached the stage wherein he has ceased to interest other hosts. When the wanderer has no prospect of being able to pay, when he has no roof left under which he can seek shelter, then and not before does he turn into these places. Then he becomes practically a prisoner. If he has any clothing or belongings, they are placed under lock and key, for the proprietor is in fact a trafficker in sailormen; and when the guest has eaten his bread and salt it is with the understanding that the host shall "find him employment" as an able-bodied seaman.

The traffic might almost be called shanghaiing in the second degree. The proprietor draws his fee from the ship's master and the guest goes before the mast to work out his debt.

From Vancouver I went before the mast on the *Celtic Queen*, a full-rigged three-master, bound for Antofagasta, Chile.

Through the agency of the blackamoor boarding-house keeper I was signed as an A. B., though I had never been to sea save as a cabin-passenger and hardly knew the royal top-gallant from the starboard light. When the vessel had weighed anchor I thought it advisable to impart this disquieting information to the captain, and having heard much of the brutality of that breed I did it with a certain trepidation. I considered that inasmuch as he could hardly escape the discovery at the first order given me it would be as well to gain the credit for a frank confession.

"Captain," I acknowledged haltingly, "there's no use trying to bluff you. I'm no A. B. at all. I'm a 'stiff,' pure and simple."

When I had admitted being a "stiff" I had entirely consumed my deep-sea vocabulary and come to the end of my nautical repertoire.

But the captain only grinned. His experienced eye had already appraised me. I was strong and quick of movement and perhaps he had, after all, made as good a bargain as he expected. He had not bought a finished product but the "makings." After two months in Antofagasta, I reshipped on the same vessel for Sydney, Australia, where for two years I wandered about the bush and "carried the swag." That term is Australian for the great tramp class; a pest almost as numerous as the rabbits, living afoot and carrying its worldly possessions in a pack on its many backs.

However, I was not a "swag-carrier" all that while. I was anxious to change that vocation for one more respectable and remunerative, and finally I secured employment as a boundary-rider. I next worked my way to Wellington, New Zealand, as a steward on the English coaster *Waikery*, and in Wellington promoted myself to the dignity of a commercial traveler. I was so employed for three years, and when at the end of that time I left Auckland for Valparaiso on the *Celtic King*, instead of going before the mast I shipped in the more august capacity of quartermaster.

ON THE BEACH IN CHILE

BUT in Valparaiso I was on the beach again, and it is from that point on that my log, in its proper sense, begins.

In Santiago one sees much of pride and sparkle, for the capital city of Chile, like almost every capital in the lower continent, boasts itself the "Paris of South America." Possibly Santiago boasts less emptily than some of her sister cities, for lying far enough below the equator to escape a wholly tropical lethargy, life goes with a more normal steadiness and energy. The Tropic of Capricorn lies as far to the north as Cancer lies south of Atlanta, and Valparaiso, the port, reflects something of the spirit of the capital. But the life of the hotels and *casas grandes* and cafés does not touch the existence of the Gringo on the beach, and it was not for long that I basked in the smile of even comparative opulence.

Before I had been many weeks the casual

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lounger of the hotels and theaters and the seeker for employment that would maintain me as such, the supply of Chilean dollars had dwindled to vanishing, and I was again of the colony that gathers at the water-front. There, after a period of interminable suspense, I met one night in a miserable café a New Zealander, whose plight was no better than my own. We had tried everything that Chile seemed to offer the itinerant unemployed—with one exception. Before us lay the choice between the negro Johnson's boarding-house, with its inevitable sequel of a voyage before the mast to some other beach across the world, and this one alternative. One topic was looming large in the talk of the town and the country. In the clubs, the hotels and on the streets one heard much of the great trade-artery that was to connect the capital of Chile with that of Argentina—the Great Western Railway. It was soon to pierce the Andes at a height of almost thirteen thousand feet and whisk the traveler in comfort to Buenos Aires, heretofore attainable only by mule-train across the Cordilleras or by voyage around the Horn.

The line had already been pushed westward from the Argentine terminal, across its pampas to the barrier of Andean ramparts and eastward from the Chilean coast. The connecting link and stiffest problem of the enterprise alone remained. The trans-Andean tunnel was being bored through the three-and-a-half mile length of its burrowing, and for the positions of bossing, steam-drilling and management of blasting had gathered a little army of Gringos. Britons and Americans under the captaining of Mr. Evans, the chief engineer, and his lieutenants made up this force. Yet the supply of available and competent men was always short of the demand and we heard that there were room and good wages for recruits to the enterprise.

The New Zealander suggested that instead of taking the outward-bound alternative we try the inward course, and so, financed only with a few loose coins that jangled dolefully in our breeches-pockets, we started on the hike to Los Andes. We had heard that there was great difficulty in keeping filled the positions of timekeepers in the tunnel, and we had talked with a number of men who had drifted back to the coast after brief incumbencies in these posts.

They gave various excuses for abandoning their employment, and in each story was the hint, to our minds, that some better reason than any stated must lie behind such wholesale failure to make good. The work itself was so simple in its demands on brain or training that any fairly intelligent boy should have been able to give adequate service. It was true that the holder must come in contact, and often in hostile contact, with a large force of native laborers who hated the Gringos, but to men on the beach, men who must either fail to survive altogether or learn to survive handily in rough circumstances, that was not a sufficient explanation. For the present the problem was one of reaching the tunnel and having our names included on Mr. Evans' payroll. The rest came later.

At Los Andes, after a day's tramp, we were given passes on the work-train to the Chilean end of the tunnel. This train was made up of cattle-cars and filled with native *Chilenos* who would have no intercourse with us, but who eyed us malevolently and mumbled among themselves with scowls fixed on us while they talked. Even a pedler of native wine and food who carried his baskets among the men crying his wares refused to talk or trade with us. An exhibition of our small hoard of money, and the arguments which our hunger prompted, had no effect on his stolid contempt. Our ostracism was complete.

THE HATED GRINGO

THIS hatred of Americans we encountered from that moment on, though we soon learned that hand in hand with it went a wholesome fear of the Gringo, once he took and maintained the offensive. These men who would cheerfully fight among themselves to the death, with their short curved belt-knives, rarely raised a hand against the bellicose American or Englishman. At last the murmuring of our carmates became loud and open insult. The New Zealander, who was quiet but resolute, turned to me and announced his convictions.

"There's just one thing for it, Yank. We've got to get in our bluff and make it strong enough to stick. You hit the man nearest you, and I'll get the next one that comes forward."

We followed that policy. At the next

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oath I lashed out at the native who was amusing himself with Gringo-heckling and landed a blow which dropped him down unconscious. Then my companion and I backed against the side of the cattle-car and invited the congregation to draw near. The effect was immediate and surprising.

Only one *Chileno* came forward, and he approached with a smile on his lips and complimented us on our attitude. It seems that he was an influential individual among his fellows, for after a brief conversation with him the food-vender laid before us a well cooked chicken, a loaf of bread and a bottle of wine. We explained that while we needed some food we did not want such an expensive repast, and that we had no *plata* beyond a few centavos. But the same man who had a few minutes before declined to treat with us on any basis now shrugged his shoulders with that universal gesture of the Latin-American and spread his hands in indifference as he smiled.

He assured us it made no difference. The food was a gift, not a sale. Of course we had little of it, since in the face of such generosity we had to show a like spirit and make a long division among our fellow travelers, but from that moment on we had ceased to be among enemies.

When we reached the construction-camp at the Chilean end of the tunnel we went at once to the miserable hovel of corrugated iron which was known among the men as the "rat-pit." It was a tawdry caravansary and restaurant where the scum of the earth were gathered, and while we were eating our supper there arrived a man, whose name I will forbear to mention, charged with culling out of this human refuse such material as might be converted into usefulness.

The New Zealander and I were at a dirty table dispatching a dirtier meal, and about us were grouped a roomful of ragged, tramp-like men, some native, some foreign, who had come like ourselves seeking refuge from the beach. It was the employing-manager's policy, I suppose, to walk among this gathering contemptuously and to assume a high hand.

"When you two get through your supper," he said curtly, pausing at our table, "I want to talk to you."

His manner and glance indicated that though he would talk with us he had already taken our measures and would in the end tell us to move on. But we had learned our lesson of bluff, and realized that among the other ruffians about the place any lack of aggressiveness would have made our lives a burden. So I seized upon this opportunity to assert myself.

"If you want to talk to me," I replied shortly, "do it now. I haven't any secrets to discuss with you."

"What are you here for?" was his next question.

"A job," I told him.

"What do you know?" he demanded and, realizing the necessity of self-assertion even to the point of mendacity, my answer was as prompt and sharp as his interrogation.

"I know construction-work from start to finish."

At that the boss laughed and then caustically remarked, "Well, I can't use any Valparaiso beach combers in my outfit."

I turned to the room at large and exclaimed in a surprised fashion, "I thought you said this fellow was a white man."

The employing-manager wheeled on me, his face very wrathful and with a long string of oaths demanded, "What do you mean by that?"

"I mean," I said, "that you seem to prefer employing half-breeds to men of your own race."

He ordered us out of the camp and left the place, but before we had finished supper he was back again, and this time he asked me—

"Can you write?"

"I think so," I replied. "I always have been able to up to now."

"Well," he said slowly, "I need two timekeepers. I've tried out a number of men and they've all flickered. I'll try you two out at seventy-five dollars a month."

I knew that that was a half-wage for the work, and replied, "We will go to work for a hundred and fifty each, if you provide board and lodging."

That sent him out of the place cursing again, but once more he came back.

"When did you leave Valparaiso?" he demanded, and we told him that we had tramped to Los Andes the day before. Neither of us had had more than a few hours of sleep in the past twenty-four.

"When can you start to work?" he asked, and I told him I was ready to go into the tunnel that night. "You can't do it," he snorted, but we reminded him that it couldn't hurt to try us out, and so it was decided.

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TUNNELING THE HIGH ANDES

FOR three months, until the construction was finished, we worked at the job. Our business was to go into the tunnel three times a day and check up the time of the five hundred *Chilenos* working in the big burrow in eight-hour shifts. We alternated and on each trip, which of course covered only the Chilean half of the tube, the timekeeper was engaged for a matter of two hours. The compressed air and the heavy stench of the blasting inside made it an acute shock when a man emerged into the rarefied atmosphere of the thirteen-thousand-foot altitude and a suffering kindred to the "bends" of underground excavators was the result.

I have frequently stood at the mouth of the opening ready to assist in catching and carrying to their beds those men who would stumble into the outside air and collapse in our arms.

There was a constant need of maintaining the iron hand inside the tunnel, and only those Gringos who promptly established their "bluff," and had always the seeming of absolute willingness to reëstablish it, were successful in handling the natives. Yet strange to say, although there were numerous violent altercations between *Chileno* and *Chileno* and later, when the two excavations met at the center, a desperate feud between *Chileno* and *Argentino*, and though the "white men" had their battles with each other, there was very little in the way of hostile encounter between the native and foreigner.

Once indeed there threatened to be bloodshed when an Englishman struck a *Chileno* and the victim went to his belt for the murderous, curved knife which these people know so well how to use. But the British overseer fell upon his man before he could draw and administered a drubbing which would have been brutal in the extreme had it not been necessitated for setting an example.

There were many disquieting episodes and dangers that called for vigilance and made the timekeeper's trips in a way trips of inspection.

Once I came at three o'clock in the morning to a point in the tunnel where blasting had been in progress and where occasional fragments of loose rock were still falling. Chancing to throw my searchlight downward into a "break" where was spread a litter of shattered stone, I saw the glint of something yellow and on closer scrutiny found that over a hundred sticks of capped dynamite had been left lying there. Had a falling chip of stone come in contact with a cap, every workman in that section of tunnel would have been blown to atoms and the work greatly damaged to boot.

I called for the responsible boss and he, after voicing some anger at my interference, started to remove the damaging evidence of his criminal neglect. That, however, I refused to permit, and called Mr. Evans from his bed to pass judgment, after leaving a guard to see that nothing was moved, and that no work was meanwhile carried on within the danger-zone. My report cost the unfortunate boss of that section his job, and for a time won for me the unenviable name of a "squealer," but to have passed by such a peril to life and construction would have been like countenancing murder.

We did not get on in unbroken peace, but it was understood that our working-code of ethics must be lived up to to the letter. All differences that occurred in the tunnel were passed until we came out, and at the back of our camp was a pen or small corral fenced in with stone and rails where these differences were adjudicated *au* Marquis of Queensbury. Scarcely a day passed without a case or two on the docket of "Judge Mix-it-up."

THE MAN WITH A MONOCLE

I REMEMBER one Englishman who came to us so fresh and spick in his tourist idea of outdoor costume that he was a caricature, and as I surveyed his monocle and yellow puttees I was moved to derisive repartee. He gazed at me blankly through his single eye-glass with that "silly ass" vacancy of expression which characterizes the Britisher of the vaudeville stage, and when I had finished he suggested complacently and still in his affected drawl, "I say, old top, do you know I can jolly well smash the —— out of you?"

Expressing deep skepticism, I retired with him to the pen where, after removing his monocle, he proceeded likewise to remove all my doubts of his superiority with such neatness, dispatch and thoroughness that I had no cause nor desire to take an appeal.

Then he extended his hand and said with

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a grin; "My word! One more victory like that would finish me."

A grisly incident of which those who travel hereafter in parlor-cars across that line will probably never know, marked the meeting of the two armies of workmen, when the *Argentino* and *Chileno* forces came together at the center of the tunnel and the two passages merged into one continuous tube.

There is no hostility between Chile and the Argentine; no such fierce national hatred, for example, as exists between *Chileno* and Peruvian, nor even between the average Latin-American of the lower class and the Gringo from North America. Yet *Argentino* and *Chileno* are both fanatically patriotic and full of national jealousy.

When, therefore, the two labor-armies, working from opposite ends, had whittled out the last separating wall of rock and stood together at the central point, there entered into their greetings much vaunting of native lands. Shouts of "*Viva Chile*" and "*Viva Argentina,*" begun in good nature, gradually assumed a hostile clamor, like that of opposing elements trying to yell each other down in a national convention.

Finally to the "*vivas*" which each side linked with the name of his country were added other adjectives insulting to the other country. Soon a *Chileno* and an *Argentino* had "mixed it up" and reached for their knives.

A KNIFE-FIGHT TO THE DEATH

THE white men interfered and hurled them apart. According to the code of the tunnel and to prevent a wholesale battle, it was permitted that the two combatants should retire to the Argentine end of the tunnel, where a level plateau afforded a natural arena, and there fight out in the national fashion the national questions involved.

To this place repaired about five hundred Chileans, five hundred *Argentinos* and the forty or fifty "white men" who were at the time in the tunnel. The two combatants made a ring and each was backed by five seconds pledged to enforce fairness and non-interference. Each had one Gringo second. I was chosen by the Chilean. On the side-lines, with a cleared space between, gathered the audience from the East and West.

The Argentine fights with a straight-bladed knife of greedy length, while the Chilean uses one hardly more than half as long, curved like a boar's tusk. It is a wicked weapon, wickedly used, and the master stroke is one which disembowels.

The pair doffed their coats and half wrapped them about the left forearms, native fashion, as a shield. Then they stuck their blades through their sombreros as a hand-guard and, shouting ferociously "*Viva Chile!*" and "*Viva Argentina!*" fell to fighting with the blood-lust of two jaguars.

It was a sickening encounter, and a bloody one, for it lasted between twenty minutes and a half hour, and was fatal to both. There was little of sidestepping or retreat on either side. At first the *Argentino*, with his longer blade, mercilessly carved the face of his adversary until it was crimsoned and mutilated, but the Chilean, wiping his eyes with his arm as he fought, kept shouting "*Viva Chile!*" Then he had his chance, and under the twisting stroke of his crescent-bladed knife the *Argentino* fell, with his entrails ripped, and died at once.

The Chilean turned away, brandishing his red blade and still shouting "*Viva Chile!*" But after two or three unsteady paces he too fell and bled to death within five minutes.

Instantly the air was full of uplifted knives and the yells of the two armies of workmen rang in an inflamed eagerness to make the quarrel a general slaughter. The "white men" had a strenuous ten minutes rushing up and down, forming a cordon between would-be battle-lines, brandishing the .44-caliber revolvers with which the company provided them, and driving the Chileans back into the tunnel and across the boundary.

When the tunnel was bored our employment was also finished, and we who had tramped up to Los Andes and journeyed the rest of the way in cattle-cars went merrily back to Valparaiso jingling in our pockets the fruit of three months' work, except that some had a little more, some a little less, according as the chances of the poker-game had augmented or depleted their store. There ensued one of those brief periods of comparative affluence when the beach comber becomes the profligate waster, squandering like a millioniare what has been so laboriously won.

For the insanity of such a course there is

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some element of excuse which if not logical is at least human. When a man who has been living under corrugated-iron roofs back in the hinterland of the world comes again to smooth streets and lighted plazas where bands play, and shop-windows that gleam with invitation to spend, the lure of civilization and its indulgences is a seductive siren song.

At all events I celebrated—and Mardi Gras does not last so long as Lent. I was soon down to my last dollar, and my last dollar was fast running out into centavos. Ahead of me was the beach.

One day I was standing down by the wharves gazing out across the forest of masts where the shipping lay and looking inward where lay nothing at all except sick hopelessness.

"Hello, Jacobson," said a gruff but not unpleasant voice at my shoulder, and I turned to gaze into the face of the American negro Johnson.

"You're kind of down and out, ain't you, kid?" was the negro's next question.

I was all of that. I had known for days that unless some easy miracle came to pass I must eventually seek Johnson's door.

"*No tengo plata*," I repeated drearily, in the set phrase that sums up the reason why the beach comber is the beach comber. "*No tengo plata.*"

"That's all right," he grinned. "Whenever you gits ready to come round, my house is open to you."

I did not thank him. I knew it was no charity. It was simply the business in which he was engaged, just as I was myself a specimen of the wares in which he dealt. I did not go to his house that day nor the next, but a day came when I went.

To make it brief, I was to ship on a four-masted bark called the *Holland*, bound for Liverpool on the following Thursday, and with the desperation of a hopeless hope I was turning over in my mind a means of escape. Escape meant paying Johnson what I owed him, and was naturally impossible.

A THIEF CALLED SMITH

ON WEDNESDAY evening I met a man whom I shall call Smith. Smith I had not seen for many months, and I knew little to his credit. He, like myself, was on the beach and his reputation was an evil one, though to me he had been somewhat kind. I was walking moodily along an alley-like street, murkily lighted, and was thinking of many things that brought me small pleasure since they harked back to the life which I had "shoved be'ind me long ago and far away," when a hand was laid on my shoulder. I turned under a street-lamp and recognized the man who had driven a steam-drill in the tunnel.

"Hello, Jacobson—" he greeted me with the English drawl which never quite left his speech—"you look a bit seedy. What's the trouble?"

I laughed, though not with a very good or merry grace, and echoed the dirge of my kind, "*No tengo plata.*"

He made me tell my story, first taking me to a saloon where the guests were mostly natives. He assured me that he had in his pockets three thousand American dollars. The announcement astonished me. My mathematics could hardly make the proposition and result tally. Three months as steam-driller at sixty dollars a month left a wide margin between the totals. Of course I knew that Smith was said to be a crook, but while he seemed unwilling to go into detail he laughed at my interrogations and said that he had found a chance for a quick bit of speculation, not perhaps in accordance with the highest ethics, yet materially honest.

He offered to "get me out of hock" with Johnson and stake me to a small loan. I accepted his assistance and was freed from the necessity of shipping with the *Holland*.

The next day I got wind of a proposition which might again rehabilitate my fortunes. I heard of possible employment with the Arica-La Paz Railroad and that night, cheered with a dawn of hope, I turned into a café on the water-front from whose door drifted the strains of an American phonograph. If I were writing fiction I should paint the picture of that café and substitute for the phonograph the tinkle of native guitars. But this is history, not romance.

Soon a crowd of Gringos entered the place, none of whom I knew, and as they talked loudly at the bar I recognized that they were cursing some one and mingling many threats with their curses. As the talk proceeded I caught the name of Smith, and very foolishly went forward and asked who wanted Smith and what was wanted of him.

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I suppose my manner indicated a friendship for the object of their animosity, for their attitude grew threatening and truculent as they told me shortly that he had stolen three thousand dollars from a man whose reputation I knew to be even shadier than his own. I saw that I was outnumbered and that if I were to be of service to my late benefactor it would not be by arguing with his pursuers, so I expressed surprise and declared that though I had once known Smith I did not know where he could be found at present.

However, my first expression had been too outspoken and they decided that I was trying to shield him; was perhaps even an accessory. The threat of their manner grew dangerous and I felt sure I should not escape trouble. Accordingly I strolled to the bar and ordered a large glass of beer. I did not care for the beer, but I greatly desired the glass, which was heavy and useful.

I saw that in a moment more they would attack me. It was now a matter of self-preservation, and I was a man "on the beach." When the bartender set my mug before me I hurled it into the face of my nearest accuser, and when he dropped to the floor the others rushed toward him.

I seized the moment of confusion to do a bit of the fastest sprinting I have ever accomplished. I made the street in safety, though I could hear the outcry at my back, but on turning the first corner I rushed into the arms of two Valparaiso policemen, who without changing their stride gathered me in.

It was a critical moment and one calling for prompt strategy. I protested with a great show of indignation that a crowd of beach combers in the saloon had assaulted and attempted to rob me. I had knocked one down, I said, and fled. The ruse was successful, for, after taking my name and address, they released me and went on to place every one inside of the drinking-house under arrest.

I hunted up Smith, walking the streets until I found him. I told him what had occurred.

"When you helped me out of my trouble," I said, "you placed me under an obligation. I have never knowingly taken stolen money. I have never stolen. I have played this game straight and handy and of course you are a thief, but none the less I owe you a good turn, and I am with you."

I persuaded him to leave, though he was all for staying and facing his enemies. He said that he had only stolen from a thief, who had previously stolen from him, and to my argument that he would be killed if he remained he answered with laughter. Smith was a crook but not a coward, and I had difficulty in persuading him to go aboard an outgoing steamer fifteen minutes before she weighed anchor. I have never seen nor heard of him since.

WATER-CARRIER, CARPENTER, WANDERER

I LEFT the Chilean port immediately after that and for a while secured employment as a water-carrier at Camp Ninety-Six for the Arica-La Paz Railway.

That lasted for a while only, and then, in company with an Englishman who was a discharged camp-cook, I set off for the tramp across the northern strip of Chile into Bolivia. Within three-days' journey of Putry, Chile, we came to a pumping-station in construction for the Arica-La Paz Railway, where there was a demand for a carpenter and helper. It was decided that the ex-cook should apply as principal and I as his assistant.

We secured the employment, and though we were not complimented on our workmanlike qualities, we collected seventy-five dollars each for three days of work. The Englishman fell sick and remained there, and I went on alone through a country where there was scarcely the chance of meeting a white man until I had reached my destination. I was now going into the country of the Amaryan Indians, who claim distinguished descent from the Incas. I set out on foot from the pumping-station near Viachi on the Amari River.

Before I reached Putry, a native village, I had to strap my pack and clothes on my head and fight my way by swimming across a narrow but very swift river. When I came late in the afternoon to the hamlet of mud huts, after a long climb into a chilling altitude, the night was growing searchingly cold.

I turned to the first Indian house along the way and knocked for admittance. There was no reply, so I hammered in the door with the butt of my revolver and entered. Inside were two men, a woman and a child, and a grateful fire burned on the hearth. I spoke to them in tones meant to disarm suspicion, but they indicated that

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they could not understand Spanish, so I walked to a seat near the fire and made myself as comfortable as possible.

After some silent watching, and the evident realization that I meant to remain, one of the men, who had pretended that he could understand no word of Spanish, came forward and asked me in a perfect command of that tongue if I wanted a hotel. I answered in the affirmative and he led me to a larger structure, very much like the houses of the poorer class of native *ranchos*.

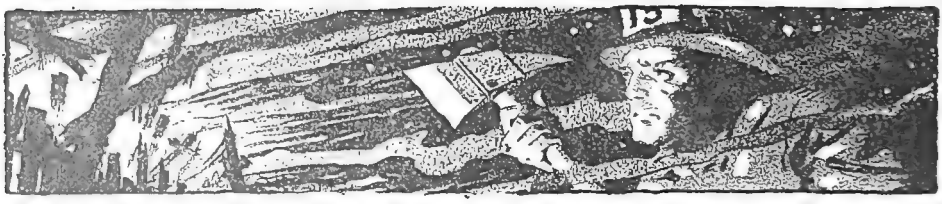
ABANDONED IN THE ANDES

I ARRANGED with the landlord the next morning to hire a mule and a guide to take me through to Bolivia, a three-days' march, paying seventy-five dollars in advance for the service. We started out in company with a burro-train bound for Hospica to bring back merchandise, and marched all day, climbing along Andean trails and dipping into deep gorges.

At night we camped high up in the mountains, hobbling the mules and lying in the open with the llama-skins and sheep-hides of the pack-saddles for bedding. I was exhausted after the day's ride and the sleeplessness of the night before, so, though usually a light sleeper, I fell into a stupefied slumber. I remember looking up at the expanse of coldly glittering stars and breathing the thin clear air, and then I remember nothing more until I awoke to find the full light of day in my eyes. I looked about to see what had happened so to delay our start, for I heard no sounds about me. Then I sat up in astonishment and bewildered chagrin. I was marooned in mid-Andes. The train, the guide, the mule for which I had paid my last dollar, all had vanished. Neither man nor beast was in sight. The guide and mule had slipped back, thus saving themselves two-thirds of the journey. The burro-train had gone on without me to Hospica.

I reached a native village at last and after persuading an unwilling Indian to give me a night's shelter by tickling his ribs with the muzzle of my .44, I also commandeered his society as a guide. I kept him with me until I had topped the ridge from which I could see a construction-camp in the distance. After a tramp totaling twenty-seven miles I reached the camp and secured work until my funds were augumented sufficiently to permit my going on.

Traditions of the Service



A Fireman Story

By

Carl Mattison Chapin

IT WAS simply beyond the comprehension of Tommolly Corrigan. If he had done it himself, there might have been reason in it, for he and Patsy the Clam were pals, bound together by the ties of years of co-operative evil-doing. But why any one else on Thirteen Truck should risk his life to save Patsy's was beyond his comprehension. Furthermore, he knew he would not have done it himself, although he was undeniably fond of Patsy and would have missed him sorely had that young career been cut short, untimely, in the cellar of Rasmussen's delicatessen.

He did not see the thing happen. At the

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time he was taking his own first dose of smoke in another part of the building—for he and Patsy had been less than a week in the Department. Patsy and "Big Tim" Culhane were tending the huge "goose-neck" cellar-pipe at the edge of the sidewalk hatchway.

Patsy's lungs were tender, and the smoke, even in the open air, was deadly. Suddenly, without a whimper, he pitched forward into the blackness of a cellar that was five parts water to one part illuminating-gas. Big Tim was less than two seconds behind him, and the thrashing cellar-pipe sped his dive after the Clam with a glancing wallop on the head.

"Old Man" Corsan, warned by that Captain's prescience which is akin to the instinct of motherhood, reached the place just as Tim came to the surface with his fist full of Patsy's slicker-collar. Tim was almost as far gone as Patsy when they hauled them out. The difference was that Patsy went to hospital; while Tim, after mauling a youthful surgeon slightly and cursing his District Chief in the teeth, went back to work.

Patsy never went back. In the expressive vernacular of the Department he had "got his bellyful."

What amazed Tommolly most of all was the complete absence of excitement over the thing. So far from making a hero of Big Tim, Thirteen Truck seemed inclined to blame him bitterly for the method, apparently quite losing sight of the result. The Captain observed that any red-headed Harp who had been ten years in the Service ought to know better than to go into a cellar like that without a rope or anybody to back him up; and Tim, instead of manifesting a proper resentment, seemed to be rather ashamed of his part in the whole affair.

It outraged Tommolly's sense of fairness. Moreover, he thought it promised him a companion in the isolation which Patsy's departure had left him to bear alone. He approached Tim with words of sympathy and admiration and a tentative offer of alliance, but Tim silently turned his back and walked away. Tommolly could not understand it.

On the second morning the affair was mentioned in General Orders. It was a gallant deed, the Commissioner stated, quite in keeping with the best traditions of the Service. Tommolly had no idea what "best traditions of the Service" might mean; but he guessed, anyway, it would hold Truck Thirteen for a while. It held them just as long as the immediate formalities kept them in line. The moment the company was dismissed "Pinhead" Fultz observed:

"Aha! I sees medals a-sproutin' on the manly boosum of our little Timmie."

Terry McNellis went Pinhead one better. From the harness-room he brought a big square of leather which he ceremoniously affixed, with a blanket-pin, to Tim's broad chest. Tim tore the insulting token away, and hurling it in the laughing faces of his comrades tramped upstairs, where he took refuge beneath the blankets of his bunk. In the smoking-room "Tim's medal" at once became a topic of loud conversation, spiced with boisterous laughter, plainly audible to the victim in the next room.

Tommolly, listening, grew more and more discontented and lonely. Patsy was gone. Tim had refused to respond to his tentative advances. He felt the need of getting into sympathy with some one, and so he sought to attune himself to the prevailing sentiment. At the next witticism his laugh was loudest of all—and in a moment he was laughing alone. It was ghastly, and he stopped. No one spoke to him, but he found every eye fixed upon him in glowering disapproval. The other men quickly turned to each other again, but they no longer spoke of medals or of Big Tim Culhane.

Presently Tim strolled in from the bunk-room. Tommolly aroused himself expectantly from his morbid cogitations, but nothing happened. In a matter-of-fact tone Tim challenged Terry McNellis to cribbage; Terry accepted, and they sat down to play.

IN THAT instant began Tommolly Corrigan's study of himself. In his experience mankind had divided itself into three classes. There was, first, his own class—the class of mean crooks whose crimes were petty, their ways devious and sneaking. He and Patsy had gravitated to this class through influences of heredity and environment too common to require recital.

Then there were the bulls, whose rôle it was to make life and livelihood as uncertain and unpleasant as possible; and lastly there

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were the "parsons," in which category he included all those who endeavored by means other than force to divorce him from the error of his ways.

Against the bulls Tommolly cherished no grudge; for the "parsons" he felt amused tolerance or exasperation, according to his own mood and the degree of their persistence. But the attitude of Thirteen Truck presented a new problem. These men were not "parsons." They were natives of his own streets; they wore the same clothes and they spoke the same direct, ingenuous language which he spoke. By all the tokens they should be his brothers, yet their silence bore to him more eloquently than the mouthings of a thousand "parsons" the fact that he was not of them. It stirred in Tommolly's soul something that was akin to, yet not purely, wrath—a sensation new and unrecognized.

For two days he studied it. Then he invited Terry McNellis to play pinocle. Terry looked up from his book abstractedly, without interest, and returned to his reading. The sensation which was not all anger surged up in Tommolly.

"Sa-ay!" he demanded. "Wot youse guys got ag'in' me, huh?"

Terry glanced up again with the air of a patient man annoyed. He seemed to debate whether such a trivial annoyance merited the further annoyance of answering.

"Ag'in' *you?* W'y, nothin' pertickler much, 'ceptin' y'r a crook an' y'r yellah. Besides, we don't bother much wit' transients down here. Tomorrah 'r nex' day we'll be gittin' a real fire an' you'll be movin' on, same as y'r side pardner did after Culhane pulled him outa th' drink. On y'r way, now—I'm busy."

It was not the first time Tommolly's crookedness had been thrown in his face, but heretofore it had been as a text for exhortation to better modes of living from people with whom he had no sympathy whatever. Now it was put squarely up to him as a reason why men whose companionship he desired did not care to associate with him. For the first time in his life, probably, he felt the sting of humiliation and the sense of being outcast. There was no sympathy, not even interest, in the eyes about him.

He went downstairs to take his turn on watch and to hammer away at his problem. His new mental processes were still chaotic. He had not formulated into thought the unfamiliar sensations of which he was dimly conscious.

What did he care, anyway, for this bunch of dubs? What difference did it make what they thought or what they said?—Except, of course, to get square with Terry McNellis for the insult direct. He would cut the whole game. Patsy and some others would welcome him back to the outside, and Thirteen Truck might go to the devil in its own besotted way.

There was, in fact, nothing to keep him longer in the Department. He and Patsy had entered it because police conditions threatened lean years in their customary business. Confronted by the necessity of earning an honest living, they had chosen the Fire Department because, in their ignorance of it, they thought it offered the maximem of return for the minimum of effort.

The reform wave which they feared had not materialized. The road lay open. Patsy had already taken it. Why should he not follow instead of remaining here to eat his heart out among men stubbornly determined not to give him a chance?

THE door-gong clanged. Tommolly shuffled across the floor and opened the portal, revealing in the half light the surreptitious countenance of Patsy the Clam. Patsy thrust his head inside and "rubbered" the apparatus-floor thoroughly. His precautionary instinct satisfied, he drew Tommolly outside the door.

"Say," he whispered, excitedly, "can dis lobster game and come wit' me. I piped de slickest lay y' ever seen."

Instinct awoke in Tommolly.

"Wot is ut?"

"Nixy! Nixy!" Patsy retorted with elaborate stealth. "Not w'ile y'r all shiny wit' buttons. Shake de uniform, and shake ut quick! Dis is a dead-ripe cinch, an' we gotta pick ut before it drops—dey'se fifty apiece in dis, bo. . . . Cheese ut!"

He slipped back into the shadow as Pinhead Fultz, gay with the thought of supper just ahead, swung open the door and stepped out. The latter halted sharply, peered into the two faces and, snapping his head up, metaphorically drew his skirts aside and passed on.

"Huh!" sniffed Patsy. "Say, ain't he haughty, huh? Say, Tommolly, how about it? Wot yuh hangin' on wit' dis cheap

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bunch f'r? Come on wit' me. It's good f'r fifty, I tell yuh!"

In the beginning the thing had appealed strongly to Tommolly, but something in the manner of Pinhead's passing put a different aspect on it.

"Nothin' doin', Clamsy," he said. "I'm drawin' down twenty a week, an' th' bulls can't touch me wit' a fish-pole. I guess I'll stick."

Patsy argued and wheedled, then waxed abusive.

"Wot's 'a matter wit' yuh, huh? Gettin' a yellah streak?"

It was then that friendship ceased. Tommolly laid a broad hand against the face of his erstwhile pal and propelled him violently to the gutter.

"You get t' —— outa here an' don't come round no more!" he hissed, and slammed the door shut.

He went back to the desk, bitter at heart. He got it either way. He was yellow because he had been a crook, and he was yellow because he wouldn't be a crook. What was the use? Everybody was against him.

But was he really yellow? He wondered. He had avoided danger because that was the best business policy—it had justified itself by preserving him from the stigma of actual arrest. He was not conscious of ever having feared anything tangible, like pain or death. And then he remembered his own confession to himself, that he would not have done what Big Tim Culhane did.

He took the Commissioner's commendation from the order-clip and reread it. He felt dimly that "traditions of the Service" must in some way be connected with Terry's refusal to play pinocle and, perhaps, with the crew's ribald treatment of Tim Culhane and his medal. It flashed upon him that the badinage which had seemed to him cruel and unjust was probably the highest form of lip-honor which these men would ever pay to a comrade.

He went upstairs when his watch was over, determined to break down the wall by sheer friendliness. Terry and Tim were playing "crib" as usual. There were few others about. For a time he watched the game, unobtrusive and unnoticed. Finally he said—

"Wot's this 'traditions of the Service' thing, hey?"

There was angry suspicion in the looks which Tim and Terry flashed up at him, and he added hastily:

"No, now; on the level, I ain't joshing. Wot's it mean?"

Terry studied him as if doubtful of his sincerity.

"Well," he drawled, "it means 'at any time a —— crook goes and falls into a cellarful o' water some good man's gotta take a chanct an' go in after him. D'yeh get ut now?"

The pure nastiness of it cut deep. Tommolly's muscles tensed, and for an instant it was an even chance that his feud with Terry would be thrashed out then and there. But he held himself in, and after a momentary struggle that distorted his face and caused Terry to grip the arms of his chair for a leap he turned away.

"Pop" Walton followed him into the bunkroom. Pop had been a perfect fireman for thirty years. He would never be more and would never be less until he died or retired. He was an oracle in the Department.

"Good work, son!" he said, laying a friendly hand on Tommolly's shoulder. "That wasn't your time—you just hold your horses till it comes. But there's more to this 'traditions of the Service' thing than anything Terry's telling you. It means just this—that the minute that old bell downstairs hits a 'Go!' you got to forget everything else.

"You may be just fixing to knife the other fellow, but you can't carry your grouch to the fire with you. If he falls into a cellar it's up to you to get him out; you can finish knifing him when you get home if you still feel you got to do it. But while you're working you got to forget all that and just remember you're both firemen.

"It ain't because firemen is angels, son; they ain't, no more than any other men. But it's a risky business, and you never know what minute it may be up to the other guy to decide whether you're going back to quarters on the truck or to the morgue on a plank. You can't do your work unless you're sure he'll help you out of a hole, and he can't do his unless he's sure of you. Do you get me, son?"

Tommolly nodded thoughtfully.

"But what yuh got ag'in' *me?*" he demanded.

The old man smiled.

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"Well," he answered slowly, "we ain't really got anything against you—you just got to make good, that's all."

"But ain't I tryin' to, huh? Say, ain't I doin' the best I kin t' be a good fellah? An' look at the deal they give me!"

Pop shrugged his shoulders.

"We're all from Missouri, son. We *gotta* be! Judas was trying to be a good fellow, for all you could tell by looking at him; and see what he had under his hat all the time. I want to give you a square deal myself, but I'll tell you this much—I wouldn't go ten feet into the smoke with you without there was somebody else backing up. I got nothing against you, y'understand; but your record ain't been very good—you got to admit that. And we can't take any chances. It's up to you, son."

LONG after the others were asleep that night Tommolly made his decision. He would quit. He had tried his best to "show them," but they refused to be shown. There was nothing else he could do, so he would quit.

It would not be easy. He realized now how distasteful the thought of the old life had become to him; what a strong appeal the new life was making—the cleanness, the self-respect, the excitement of waiting with the certainty that something would unfailingly happen, the keen swell of joy when the tapper sounded a "Go!" the exhilaration of the wild, clanging rush through the streets with the blurring kaleidoscope of staring faces on either side.

Of the fires themselves he was still timid because he did not yet know them—their ways and what they might do. But he felt no dread of them; yet what was the use? The keystone of his arch of happiness was missing, and it could not stand. Life in the house would always be——

Tink-tink-tink——

IT WAS the swift, faint voice of the tapper downstairs; but so far had he drifted already back toward the old life that the things of the new were losing their power over him. The room flashed into light to the clang of the big brazen house-gong. All about sounded the creaking of beds, the gasps and snorting of suddenly awakened men, the heavy, rasping thuds of their rush for the sliding-pole; but still he did not stir. The last man had disappeared through the trap before he roused himself. He reached the floor barely in time to jump the truck as it rolled over the door-sill.

Within a block they rounded up in front of a shuttered store veiled with a thin haze of smoke. The lieutenant tried the door and found it fast.

"Open 'er up!" he snapped. It was Corsan's day off.

Terry McNellis was first to reach the doorway. He swung his ax once; then, catching sight of Tommolly, thrust it into his hands.

"Hey, you! Get busy!" he growled.

Tommolly, nothing loath, gripped the ax and stepped into the doorway, while Terry edged back, grinning about him at the other men. There was slight room for ax-play in the narrow entry; it was a job for a door-opener, and Corsan would have used one had he been there. But the lieutenant, with the same motive perhaps as that which inspired Terry's grin, stood back and let Tommolly fight it out.

The latter wielded his shortened ax with all the power his cramped position permitted, but the weapon thudded harmlessly against the heavy door. The heat, the thickening smoke, and the violent effort started the sweat and made him pant. His heavy fire-hat bothered him; he removed it with an upward sweep of his forearm. An engine-crew arrived and stretched in. The pipe-squad stood fidgeting on the sidewalk, trailing their limp line.

The runabout of a District Chief swooped up to the curb and stopped with a cough. The Chief charged across the sidewalk, scattering firemen right and left.

"Hey, wot in —— Wot's t' matter wit' yuh?" he sputtered. "Git that door open! Hit it on the lock, yuh big stiff!"

To him Tommolly was merely a fireman making a distinguished botch of his door-opening. To Tommolly the Chief was another persecutor, leagued in the conspiracy to deny him his chance. Stung by the thought as much as by the words, he crashed the ax-head against the lock and for the first time felt it yield. He swung again, and the door leaped free of the bolt and swung inward, loosing upon him a great, soft belch of smoke so hot it seared his unguarded head and went to his lungs like chloroform. He reeled backward and dropped like a log. The pipe-men charged

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over him to the attack, snaking the rough hose-jacket across his face.

"Git him outa th' way!" snapped the Chief.

Terry and Tim Culhane dragged him with little ceremony to the curb and left him for a driver to minister to. A little later an ambulance-surgeon came and patched the broken spot where his head had struck the sidewalk, and where the hose had left its abraded trail across his face. The surgeon was professionally disturbed by Tommolly's appearance and mutterings.

"Guess I better take him along," he remarked tentatively.

To his surprise no one objected—not even Tommolly. To him it seemed the simplest way out of it—to go, as Patsy had gone, to a comfortable bed and never come back. Terry McNellis, passing with a pike-pole, offered the only comment.

"Ta-ta!" he jeered. "Where shall we send y'r clothes?"

Tommolly came to his feet with a suddenness that surprised the surgeon and almost upset him. He reeled to the truck, grabbed a pike-pole, and staggered into the reeking store.

The fire had been killed quickly; there remained the work of washing down. For an hour Tommolly, perched on precarious counters, stabbed and slashed and dragged at the metal ceiling, that most infernal of man's inventions for the tormenting of hapless firemen. The long, springy strips of galvanized iron, eluding the pike, battered his head; the edges of them cut his hands and once or twice his face, raw from the rasping of the rough hose. The dust of ages sifted down into the stinging agony of his wounds, but he shut his teeth and stuck it out.

He was not conscious that he had done this for the sake of praise, yet he did feel dully surprised and hurt that no one spoke of it when it was done. The only discernible difference in the attitude of Thirteen Truck was that it ceased to bait him. Its ostracism of him from that time was passive, but it was none the less absolute; and Tommolly, conscious that he had done well, was strengthened in his brooding suspicion that the Company was determined to freeze him out regardless of anything that he might do.

Could he have read the mind of Thirteen Truck he would have found that it concerned itself with him far less than he thought. It had, to be sure, approved his conduct; but that was all in the day's work, a thing to be expected of any fireman, regardless of his antecedents. But this Tommolly did not know.

EVERY day for the next two weeks he resolved finally to resign; and every day he put the thought from him. He told himself that he would not give them the satisfaction of sneering and triumphing behind his back. But the true cause lay deeper than this—a great deal deeper, though he did not recognize the fact or, at least, admit it to himself.

To quit the Service meant to surrender his new-found independence and self-respect—to cringe and duck at sight of the police instead of swinging past with his uniformed shoulders as square as theirs. It meant to surrender the joy of fighting an honest fight. It meant that he no longer would be a part of Thirteen Truck.

This last aspect was farthest of all from recognition in Tommolly's mind. He hated Thirteen Truck individually and as an organization. He would rejoice to see it tumbled into the abyss of degradation. Yet when Truck Twenty-three, by grace of its new gasoline hayrick, swooped out of the residence district and stole a Commercial Street fire almost in the shadow of Thirteen's flagstaff, anger swelled until it drove out even his bitter personal wrongs.

He forgot for the moment that these other men were leagued together for his undoing, remembering only that they and he, together, were Thirteen Truck and that Thirteen was disgraced by a band of dudes whose destiny by rights lay among shingled roofs and grass-fires. But the rest of Thirteen did not forget. They barred him from the Company's sorrows as from its joys and sternly repressed their own wrath in his presence, denying him even the solace of looking on in sympathy.

It was then that Tommolly faced the sneaking, furtive hopes which he had allowed to lurk in the back of his mind, and branded them for the fallacious things they were. And this time his resolution to resign was not the pettish resolution of a boy but the quiet determination of a man. And like it was the determination to stay until he could thumb his nose at the rest of the crew and whip Terry McNellis as his parting act.

It was in this mood that he jumped the truck next afternoon when the tapper

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sounded a call from Commercial Street—the same box as that on which Twenty-three had beaten them the day before. There they were again, with their shining new motor-truck drawn up in front of a smoke-filled hardware-store, just salvaging the dynamite-chest from its cache near the door. Tommolly's soul ached with a desire to drive his fist into one of those leering faces.

It was a cellar-fire, and Twenty-three was doing all the truck-work which seemed necessary to be done—doing it very poorly, Thirteen thought, as it lounged beside its own battle-scarred truck and growled at the basic cussedness of things in general. Warren, the District Chief who had abused Tommolly for his poor ax-work on a previous occasion, beckoned to the crew and it responded eagerly. Warren waved Tommolly back with a look of recognition.

"You hold them horses," he ordered. "I got no time to fool wit' dubs. Here, you driver, come along!"

Tommolly watched them dully as they trailed Warren through a narrow passage that led to the rear. The Chief's slur served to bring his troubles flocking back upon him. He was prone to forget them almost entirely when the tang of smoke got into his nostrils. A Deputy Chief drew up in front of him. As he climbed from the car Warren emerged from the doorway of the store, took a deep breath of the fresh air, spit the smoke out of his mouth and, seeing the Deputy, made for him.

"We ain't hittin' 'er at all, Dep," he said huskily. "She's square in the middle, an' they's a brick boiler-room keepin' the water off her. I got all the lines but one in back, but I can't hit 'er from there, either. Goin' to cut through the floor an' see if I can paste 'er wit' a cellar-pipe."

At that moment Terry McNellis emerged from the passage on an errand to the truck. The Deputy hailed him.

"Get an ax and come with me."

Tommolly watched them stoop and disappear into the smoke. The pipe-crew, working through the front hatchway, shut down its stream. Tommolly helped them light the heavy line through the door, then returned to his horses. Warren's insult was [illegible] in his mind. Evidently the fire was "getting away," and he was glad of it. Not evilly glad; but he craved a good fire and had not had one.

He could hear the *thud! thud!* of Terry's ax—dull at first, then sharper, with a splintering sound as the steel took hold. The street about him was almost deserted, save for the drivers and a few civilians wearing fire-line badges. The pounding ceased, and suddenly there came a soft, belching roar that drove a huge balloon of smoke half across the street. An infinitesimal instant of silence, shattered by a horrid, snarling crackle, like the volley-firing of an unskilled regiment. Something went *zut!* against a ladder, close to Tommolly's head. The iron trolley-pole behind him sang as a missile pinged against it.

"Cartridges! My God!" gulped a voice; and the civilians ducked for cover, out of range.

The only sign that Tommolly knew was a shortening of his neck. Half crouching, he stood there, his eyes fastened on the doorway, his muscles tensed as if he held himself by an effort. The smoke stirred and out of it staggered a pipeman, dragging Warren by the arm-pits. A moment later two more, half carrying the Deputy, whose face was smeared with blood. Last of all came reeling out the fourth man of the pipe-squad, who crumpled in a heap as he reached the sidewalk.

Fifteen seconds more Tommolly stood there, watching for Terry to appear. The volleying had risen to a snapping roar. Tommolly seized a nosepiece from the truck and drove for the door. One of the pipemen, clinging weakly to a post, hailed him; but he paid no heed. He stooped swiftly to dip the sponge of the smoke-guard in the water of the gutter. He slipped it over his face, and dropping to his knees crept into the smoke.

All about him the smoke was filled with strange sounds—the *chug!* of lead into wood, the metallic *tzing!* of it against steel. Far back on the left of the store was the snapping crater, and underrunning all the other sounds the guttural purring of the fire as it roared up through the hole McNellis had made. Back there somewhere was Terry—dead probably; but that made no odds. . . .

He was going it blind; his eyes had closed at the first bite of the smoke. His head thumped an obstruction which he knew must be the end of the counter. He edged to the left and entered the alleyway behind it, sheltered from the wind of lead which swept the store.

The smoke grew hotter. It was deadly thick, and the wet sponge was a frail bar-

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rier against it. His head began to sing with a sinister whining that rose and rose and rose until it seemed to bore at the inside of his skull. His brain was filled with the clangor of bells—mad, discordant bells that seized upon the lilt of a song he knew and pounded it out with horrid dissonances, note by note; just one line over and over until his teeth grated with the agony of it.

He was leaving the floor. His body floated in the air, and he dug his nails into the planks to hold himself down. He no longer knew where he was nor why he had come there. His blurred consciousness retained but one clear idea—to fight; and so he fought, inch by inch, ahead.

His groping hand fell upon something soft—warm. Flesh—a hand! The reaction of the contact drove a rift into the murk of his brain as a breeze cleaves the fog. It was Terry, stretched through an opening in the counter where he had fallen, no doubt, in his rush for the door. Tommolly grasped the wrist and tugged with what strength remained in him, but the quarters were narrow and the body was wedged against the counter. There would not be time to do it that way; he must shoulder it and run.

He struggled to his knees, somehow raised the body and slung it to his shoulder. He dragged himself to his feet, swaying beneath the burden, and stepped forward into the open store, full in the drive of that deadly sleet. For an instant he steadied himself by the counter, blindly taking his bearings; then started at a staggering half-run toward the door.

The *chug!* and *tzing!* of the bullets and the whine of their passage filled the whole place. His balance was gone. He knew that he was lurching to a fall, and he called upon the last of his strength to make that lurch carry him to the door. Ten paces, perhaps, he staggered on, like a runner who has stubbed his foot against a stone. A dazing blow above his ear, a swift sear of pain, and he pitched to the floor with Terry sprawled across his head.

THIRTEEN TRUCK, warned by the groggy pipe-man, was worming its way like a human snake into the smoke when it felt the jar of that fall. An instant later the big paws of Tim Culhane were clutching the coats of the two unconscious comrades while his boot signaled backward, "Haul away!" In another long minute Thirteen Truck was reunited on the sidewalk.

They took Tommolly and McNellis to hospital and put them in private rooms because the wards were full. It was after dark when Tommolly awoke to consciousness and, a moment later, to a realization of where he was and that he had committed the unpardonable sin of allowing himself to be brought there.

Heatedly he confided in the nurse and in the orderly and, a little later, in the intern. They heard him with stony hearts and plausible words and presently departed, taking his clothes with them and bidding him sleep. Eighteen minutes thereafter, as Thirteen Truck was wearily backing into quarters, Tommolly Corrigan, panting and tousled, clad in a turban of bandages and a variegated bathrobe, lurched through the door and stood before them, half expectant, half fearful. They stared in amazement; then a howl of laughter went up that made the harness sway. Out of it rumbled the big bass of Healy, the driver:

"Look ut 'im, now! Will yuh look ut 'im! So hot after his medal he cudn't wait till mornin'!"

At that everything went black for Tommolly. When the light returned he lay on the floor with his head in Big Tim's lap. Pinhead stood by, holding a glass of water. He passed it down to Tim and sniffed audibly.

"Told yuh he was fakin'!" he jeered. "Thinks if he makes ut bad enough he'll git two of 'em. Maybe they'll give him yours, Tim."

"Shut up!" snapped Tim.

He arose to his feet and picked up Tommolly like a baby. At the top of the stairs, in the glare of the corridor-light, he stopped and looked down into Tommolly's face while his arms tightened the least bit.

"Gee, but you're a mess!" he said.

And that was as near as anybody on Thirteen Truck ever came to saying anything about it—even Terry McNellis, after a month in hospital.

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The Getaway

By Rudolph R. Krebs

ONCE clear of the cooper-shop, Convict 1313—"Double Jinx," as he was called in the underground prison-argot — paused, and with the rough sleeve of his prison coat wiped the salty perspiration from his eyes. The sudden plunge from the hot dryness of the shop to the raw, humid air outside pricked his lungs like fine needles.

His heart drummed painfully loud, so loud in fact that to his strained ears the walls on the other side of the quadrangular court seemed to echo and reëcho the sound. He pressed his hand hard against his ribs to muffle the thunderous beat. He cast furtive glances about.

In the shadow of the wall where he crouched, the fog lay thick as swan's-down, though of a sulfurous hue. The fog, the one factor absolutely necessary to the success of his enterprise, and the only one beyond his control, was lavishly kind to him. It lay heavy upon the prison walls, blurring with its genie-touch the stern outlines of the buildings in this city of abandoned hope.

To the right, at regularly spaced intervals, shafts of tawny light from the windows of the broom-shop struggled half-heartedly through the turbid mist. At the far end, shadowy and indistinct, with a dot of fire here and there, lay the offices. A little to the left of these, and barely distinguishable as a shadow of shadows, huddled the garage.

Two hundred yards away a row of emergency electrics—like so many jack-o'-lanterns, with fringed halos of golden fleece pulsing feebly in the gloom—marked the location of the outer wall. From its turreted top came the measured scuff of shoe upon stone as the guards paced to and fro.

It was four of the afternoon.

Double Jinx flattened himself against the brick wall, waiting. Never had his senses been more alert, never his instinct keener. Ruthless, amazingly self-confident, with a cunning hand that flashed synchronously with his lightning brain, he had earned for himself a reputation for profligacy unequaled in the criminal annals of the Big City.

His incarceration and subsequent boast that before the year was up he would be out had been the sensation of the day, eight months before. And now he was on the eve of his great *coup*.

FROM the broom-shop opposite, with head and shoulders alone faintly outlined in the upper stratum of light from the windows, like a swimmer breasting the flood, a shadow bobbed toward him. Double Jinx caught the soft scrape of an unguarded shoe upon the brick and a moment later the figure ranged itself beside him.

"Your shoes," he gritted. "Take 'em off!"

The stocky figure with the projecting jaw and hidden eyes slumped down and obeyed.

"Put 'em inside your belt. Hustle now. The silencer?"

The yegg indicated a bulge in the breast of his jacket. The master criminal inserted his hand and drew forth a sock, the lower end of which was packed with sand. It made a crude but effective blackjack. He weighed it in his hand.

"It'll do," he grunted.

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"What next?" the yegg whispered, as he gave a final pat to the shoes in his belt.

"The garage. Come on."

The master crook moved like a shadow. The yegg followed pussy-footed in his wake. Of a low degree of intelligence, he nevertheless possessed brute courage and could be relied on to carry out instructions.

He had but a vague idea of the part he was to play in the escape. He was content to follow the lead of the master crook, knowing that therein lay his only hope of escape from the walls that hemmed him in.

The garage lay directly ahead. It was a comparatively recent innovation, dating from about the time of Double Jinx's enforced acceptance of the State's guardianship. A portable structure of sheet-iron, it was large enough to house two cars, the warden's and the deputy's. From it a graveled road swept in a graceful curve to join the main drive that led to a heavily barred side postern. Passing through this the drive hugged the wall its entire length, turned the corner, ran along the western wall a hundred yards and then dipped into the town.

It was the custom of the deputy to be taken downtown in his car at four o'clock. As his chauffeur he had selected a weak-kneed trusty, called "the Runt," who had a natural aptitude for mechanics, and whom the deputy trusted to such a degree that he often sent him on errands to the town. On this waning afternoon the Runt was busily engaged in washing the deputy's car, whistling as he worked. So intent was he on his task that it was not until the master criminal and the yegg were well within the door that a subtle sixth sense of impending danger caused him to raise his head.

Sponge and hose dropped from his nerveless hands. He gaped in open-mouthed consternation at the two forms leaping at him. His eyes dilated; a startled exclamation arose to his lips, to end in a strangled sob as the master crook's fingers closed on his windpipe.

"Shorty, watch the door!" Double Jinx hissed. "I'll 'tend to him."

He eased the unresisting Runt to the floor, still clutching his throat. He kneeled down beside him, and relaxing his grip slightly to permit the Runt to breathe he swiftly outlined his intentions.

"Are you with us or against us?" he asked finally.

The Runt, within an ace of strangulation, had but one answer to make. He nodded his head and Double Jinx, although he did not place much faith in the enforced allegiance, helped him to his feet.

"Remember," he said, as he fixed the cowering wretch with his eyes, cold and sharp as flint, "if you play me false, I'll kill you if it's the last thing I ever do."

And the Runt, seeing the pitiless, icy gleam in the crook's eyes, knew that he would keep his word.

"Is the deputy going out today?" the big crook shot at him.

"I—I think so," was the stuttered reply.

"How much gasoline have you in her?" The crook indicated the car.

"I filled the tank today."

The crook stepped to the car and lifting the seat-cushions verified the chauffeur's statement.

"Put up the side curtains."

The Runt obeyed unhesitatingly, almost eagerly. He moved about as in some ghastly dream, without thought or volition of his own, every nerve and fiber of his being under the complete control of the master crook's dominant personality.

The succeeding minutes flew by with amazing rapidity. Double Jinx ransacked the pockets of the warden's car for anything that he thought might prove serviceable to them in their flight. He came upon a motor-cap, goggles, and a linen duster.

The duster proved a tight fit, but by dint of a little twisting and squirming he finally got his shoulders into it.

Satisfied that he could wear it if need arose, he removed it and laid it in the back seat of the deputy's car. A score of other details required attention. Time pressed; yet his every move was studied, deliberate, without the hurry that makes waste.

A SUDDEN hiss from the gorilla-like watcher at the door, and the latter's spontaneous, backward leap recalled him to dangers that, in his concentration on the work in hand, he had shoved to the back part of his brain.

With a bound, tiger-like in its supple grace, he was at the yegg's side.

"The dep—coming!" ejaculated the yegg, a-quiver with excitement.

"Get behind the car!" Double Jinx directed swiftly.

He shoved the yegg in that direction.

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"Pick up your hose and sponge and look busy," he snarled at the Runt.

In the same breath he glided softly behind the door and drew forth the homely "silencer."

Steps approached outside; halted; came again.

The Runt, terror robbing him of the power of locomotion, stood rooted in his tracks, as a sleep-walker awaking at the edge of a precipice. The yegg signaled to him frantically. Double Jinx turned his head. His quick eye caught the situation at a glance. He nodded to the yegg.

Without a second's hesitation the latter crossed the space separating him and the Runt, caught him by the throat with the stubby fingers of one hand, lifted him bodily with the other and carried him out of sight behind the car before the approaching footsteps had fallen twice. It was a remarkable exhibition of coolness and despatch.

The master crook nodded his head in grim approval, then turned to confront the peril, unseen but inevitable, that was advancing upon them through the fog.

When another step would have brought him well within the door, the deputy stopped and stood looking off across the quadrangle. From where the crook crouched flattened against the door, muscles tensed for a spring, only the blue-coated shoulder was visible.

The crook waited patiently, like a cat before a mouse-hole. A false move now, a single second's relaxation of mind or muscle, would spell sudden, crashing ruin. If he felt a rash impulse to leap out and bring the affair to a crisis, his cruelly set face gave no indication other than the little beads of sweat that oozed out on his forehead.

Minutes heavily freighted with suspense dragged by.

Suddenly the deputy turned on his heel. He swung across the threshold. Even as his foot touched the boards of the garage-floor, his eyes caught sight of the gray figure swooping down upon him.

He uttered a startled oath. Simultaneously his hand moved like lightning to his hip-pocket; but before he could draw his pistol the sandbag fell with crushing force upon his head. He reeled under the shock.

Without compunction Double Jinx struck again, viciously. The deputy's hands dropped limply to his side. His knees crumpled beneath him. He lay very still.

The crook bent over him. He felt for the pulse with fingers that barely trembled. It came slow, but strong. Shorty slipped up beside him and stirred the prostrate form with his foot. From behind the car there came a craven whimpering.

Double Jinx proceeded to rifle his victim's pockets. A gold watch, a cigar-case, a bill-fold, a meager handful of silver, a match-safe, a heavy pocket-knife and a wicked-looking automatic were the articles he fished out. He commenced to gather the smaller articles and tie them in the deputy's handkerchief.

The yegg picked up the bill-fold. His small eyes lighted with cupidity as they fell on the strata of yellow and green banknotes. A hand flashed toward him and ruthlessly snatched the treasure from his grasp.

He started forward with an oath. The cold, contemptuous gaze of Double Jinx met him. He recoiled as if he had been struck. The big crook bared his teeth in an amused smile.

"I'll take care of this," he observed grimly, as he stuffed the plunder into his shirt. "Help me get off his coat," he added, closing the incident.

To remove the coat, gag and bind the prisoner—with strips torn from the latter's own shirt—and then to deposit the inert form in the bottom of the rear seat was the work of a moment.

The crook turned to the whimpering huddle behind the car.

"Get up!" he commanded, kicking him in the ribs. "If you had a string of nerve I'd make you drive the car. Get into the back seat. Croak him if he bleats," he said to the yegg, who was stepping in with the Runt.

"Toss out that coat and cap—the goggles too, you fool! Get into this."

He tossed up the deputy's coat.

"Now listen carefully," he admonished, when he had squirmed into the glove-fitting duster. "When we head for the gate I'll blow the horn twice. Crouch down in your corner and don't let yourself or the Runt be seen. If I blow the horn for the second time, thrust your arm through the loose flap on the side and do like this. See?"

He motioned with his hand.

"If I blow for the *second* time——" he repeated.

"I git yuh." The yegg gave a perfect imitation of the leader's motion.

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THE master crook cranked the car. The engine responded rhythmically, almost noiselessly. As he grasped the steering-wheel and opened the throttle, he experienced the first twinge of misgiving. What if the car should refuse to respond to his touch?

His mind did not linger long on this contingency, for with a bound the car spurned the garage and rolled smoothly out upon the gravel.

The distance between the garage and the main drive, short though it was, afforded the convict sufficient time to accustom himself to the machine's peculiarities. So his hand lay lightly on the wheel as he swung the car into the main drive and slowly, deliberately headed it for the gate.

The supreme moment was at hand. Hardened though he was, Double Jinx felt a sudden tightness about the throat, a sudden mad upward leap of his heart. The gravel road swam before his eyes and verged into the sea of mist.

He swallowed hard, settled the goggles more firmly on his nose, and with a swift, silent appeal to the demons of luck, reached out, and pressed the bulb of the horn, once —twice!

It was a moment fraught with the suspense that bends a man's nerve to the breaking-point. Everything hinged on the gatekeeper's action. Would the sheer audacity of the move spell its success? Would he open the gate and allow the car to pass unchallenged? The fate of the perilous venture hung by a hair.

The guard turned, saw the approaching car, hesitated—and neither accelerated nor retarded his speed by the hundredth of a revolution. A blue-sleeved arm emerged from the rear seat. There was no mistaking the commanding gesture.

The gates swung slowly inward. The guard saluted as the car rolled through. Double Jinx punctiliously returned the salute. The gates clanged to behind him. He was out, with a clear road ahead.

The convict's fingers itched to advance the spark, to leap ahead with all the speed of the high-powered car. But the Runt had told him that the deputy never allowed him to drive fast, and so, although every nerve cried clamorously to him for haste, he held the car down to the twenty miles per hour indicated by the speedometer.

He sensed rather than heard the yegg's insistent, low-voiced objurgations for more speed, but the only answer he vouchsafed was a decided negative shake of the head.

The penitentiary still cast its threatening shadow over him. On the wall he could hear, above the purr of the motor, the measured tramp of armed guards. It would be the height of folly, he knew, to jeopardize the success that was almost in his grasp by an injudicious burst of speed. Never in his adventurous life had he lived through such tense moments.

At the sudden touch of the yegg's hand on his shoulder his raw nerves jumped as if they had been rasped by a file. The car swerved to the side of the road. With a fervent malediction he righted it.

"—— you!" he snarled, heedless of caution as red-hot anger at himself for betraying his trepidation, and at the man who had provoked its disclosure, flared up in him. "Don't try that again or I'll brain you."

"Aw ——! Hit 'er up. I'm gittin' tired o' holdin' dis guy's pipes. He'll blat. Fer —— sake, give 'er the juice!"

"Gag the Runt, you——. Sit tight and leave the rest to me! Steady now!"

At the word he turned the car into the town's main thoroughfare. Behind him the ugly, frowning walls of the penitentiary receded quickly into the mist.

It was in keeping with his spectacular daring and yet not in a spirit of bravado that he made this move. Behind the seeming foolhardiness of the hazard lay a carefully considered purpose.

Back in his cell, as he lay through the long reaches of many nights staring at the blackness overhead, his plan of escape had slowly formulated in his mind. Countless times he had gone over every step of his plan, making allowance for every contingency that occurred to him, however remote; accepting, rejecting, recasting until he had a model well-nigh infallible.

And now when event succeeded event without a break in continuity, as in a carefully rehearsed play, he experienced the keen satisfaction of the chess-player who has anticipated his opponent's every move and has provided for it.

His elation was short-lived.

At the corner of Verne and Hawley Streets, Officer Ryan recognized the deputy's car bearing down on him through the fog, and as they came abreast he raised an

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admonitory hand. Without knowing why he did so, the yegg thrust his arm through the side curtains. The light from the arc lamp overhead glinted on the gold sleeve-buttons.

"Your lights, deputy," Ryan said good-naturedly.

It had all happened in the twinkling of an eye. The danger had loomed up before them—then was gone. Double Jinx withdrew his hand from his shirt where lay his automatic, and switched on the electric headlights. It had been a narrow squeak due to his own carelessness. He resolved not to be caught napping again.

TWO blocks down, the convict turned the car into a side street where, secure from interruption, he shot a rapid fire of questions at the Runt, who answered glibly enough after the yegg had removed his gag.

He swung back to Hawley Street. At this hour of the day it was practically deserted. Indeed, as the master crook had anticipated, the penetrating drizzle that accompanied the saffron fog kept all indoors except those called forth by urgent business.

On the right-hand side of the street, red and blue pin-pricks in the curtain of mist showed the location of the drug-store. Double Jinx drew up at the cross-street curb and alighted.

"Watch those guys. I'll be out in a minute," he informed the yegg.

A pimple-faced clerk, ensconced behind the counter, was busily engaged in reading the "dope-sheet" when Double Jinx entered. He barely glanced up, and answered the crisp query "Public telephone?" with a languid nod of his head to the booth in the corner.

He resumed his reading, little dreaming that the State's most notorious criminal was passing within two feet of him. If he had glued his ear to the crack in the door he might have heard the following monologue:

"Hello! Stein's? This is Gilpatrick, the deputy warden talking—Gilpatrick, yes. We are going to release a couple of men tomorrow and I find that we are short on two sizes. Suits of course! What do you suppose; coffins? One 40, the other 38. How much are they in a cheap but serviceable black? What? No black? Yes, blue serge would do if they were reasonable in price.

"Thirty dollars? Too much! I don't care a tinker's cuss for the style. Conservative. Anything at all, y'know—I'm not wearing them! Twenty-two would be all right. Hm, hm! No, you needn't send them up. I've sent my man down. He ought to be there by this time. And say he has a commission from one of the men—shirts, collars, etc. Better send the rest back. Send the bill to me. Yes, for both. That's all right. Perfectly welcome. G'by."

The clerk was still immersed in his sporting sheet when Double Jinx, his face twisted in a grin of self-satisfaction, emerged from the booth. Evidently he had heard nothing.

The car stood as he had left it. The street was quiet. He walked to the corner, glanced up and down, then retraced his steps, gazing searchingly at the hooded car the while. To the casual observer, he reflected, the occupants of the rear seat were invisible.

"Now, Shorty," he said to the yegg, "you do your trick. Slip into the Runt's cravenette. You'll find it below the cushion. I'm going to drive to Stein's clothing store. You go in and tell him you've come from the deputy. Give him this list—"he drew forth a folded sheet of paper—"and don't talk. He's expecting you. Just go in and hand him the paper. Don't seem anxious to get away. Loaf, or pretend to. If anything should happen, I'll blow the horn twice and you run like the devil for the car. D'you get me?"

The yegg repeated the directions.

STEIN'S proved to be on a corner. Double Jinx sought the seclusion of the cross-street. Shorty scrambled out to shake dice with Fate. Disdaining the side entrance, he shuffled furtively around to the front. Below the edge of his cravenette the gray prison trousers showed plainly as he entered the area of light from the shop-window.

The risk was enormous if a penitentiary official should happen along, yet a change of suits had to be procured at any price. Once in the store the yegg would be accepted as a trusty and there was little to fear; the cool effrontery of the scheme would see it through.

The master crook glanced at the chronometer on the dash before him. It registered 4:45. Three-quarters of an hour had

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passed since he had cowered against the wall waiting for the yegg. In that period everything had worked out with clock-like precision.

The fog for which he had been waiting these many weary weeks was growing ever thicker with the falling of night. Few pedestrians were astir, and these, with chins sunk into upturned collars and hats pulled low, crossed the street without a glance aside. From behind him came the stertorous breathing of the deputy and a thin wheeze from the Runt. Double Jinx assured himself that their bonds were intact, and resumed his vigil.

Meanwhile the yegg had taken his courage in both hands and had entered the store. He looked about him for the proprietor. His advent caused a little stir of excitement among the three clerks gathered in the rear of the store. One of them with a wink at the others sauntered up. He looked the yegg up and down. His lip curled contemptuously.

"You from the pen?" he asked.

The written word can not convey the measure of scornful superiority, of overbearing insolence, in the clerk's tone and manner.

The yegg's hairy hands clenched unconsciously. He leaned forward, poising on his toes. Fierce passion mounted to his eyes and deep behind there kindled the lust to kill. His yellow teeth bared in an animal-like snarl.

The clerk shrank back. His face turned a dirty white. A hoarse note of terror escaped his lips. He turned to flee and bumped squarely into the proprietor, who appeared from behind a rack.

"Hello! What's this?" he ejaculated as he grasped the trembling clerk by the sleeve.

"Dis 'ere ribbon-pusher tries to git the high and mighty over me an' I wuz 'bout to push in his face," explained the yegg. "I'm fr'm the dep'ty."

Stein evidently understood the situation.

"Get!" he told the clerk. "Now what do you want?" he asked the yegg, anxious to get rid of this evil-faced messenger.

The yegg handed him the note. Stein's eye traveled down the list. It was in pencil and included everything that a man of means released from prison would require to conceal his past from a prying and knowing world. If the comprehensive scope of the list had aroused in the crafty clothier's mind any suspicion of the truth, the deputy's O. K. and dashing signature below—in ink—effectually lulled it to sleep.

The yegg assumed a negligent pose against the counter, while Stein and his clerks gathered an assortment of wearing-apparel.

It was a plethoric bundle that finally rested on the showcase. Beside it the proprietor deposited the bundle containing the suits; and Shorty, declining somewhat ungraciously the proffered help, took both in his arms and made his way out of the store.

A MINUTE later the car, with the crook's hands glued to the steering-wheel and his eyes riveted on the street ahead, was racing madly down Broadway. With cut-out wide open and horn sending ahead its raucous warning, the automobile, like some huge, misshapen monster bent upon destruction, hurtled through the fog.

It roared past Officer Kay on the post-office corner and was swallowed by the night, before that worthy could collect his senses. A few minutes later a wildly incensed farmer drew up his lathered team at the corner and complained in language luridly embellished that a black car, "runnin' like a black hound through the fog," had come within an ace of crashing into him on the Big City pike just as he was entering the town.

The fugitives in the deputy's car were leaving a broad trail for the Big City twenty-four miles away. The Big City, the natural refuge of the escaped convict, with its thousand and one places of concealment, had flashed its lure before the eyes of more than one of the men who in years past had successfully eluded stone walls and human vigilance.

Almost without exception the city had delivered them up. The yegg, who throughout the wild dash through the town had clung to the seat with one hand and had held the Runt with the other to keep him from sliding atop the deputy, revolved this fact in his mind. It filled him with chill foreboding.

He might have spared himself these gloomy anticipations. For when they had proceeded a half mile away from the town, the big crook suddenly switched off the lights and turned the car to the left into a country road leading at right angles to the Big City pike.

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When, after following this road for two miles, he again turned sharply to the left the significance of the maneuver flashed upon the yegg. With characteristic audacity the master criminal was again doing the unexpected.

Instead of being headed for the Big City as the purposely wide trail indicated, he was swinging in a wide arc around the penitentiary town to gain the north road; and while the pursuit would head in full cry toward the Big City, he would be miles away in the opposite direction. It was all so beautifully simple, and yet so devilishly clever!

They were on a desolate stretch of road. The penitentiary town lay far behind them and to the left, marked by a faint, phosphorescent glow in the muggy shroud of fog.

The car slithered and slid in the slimy ooze that already was forming a frozen crust. Gray, serpentine rail-fences wormed past them in the gloom. The yegg shivered.

Suddenly Double Jinx jammed down the brakes. The car skidded across the road. The yegg and the Runt were thrown violently forward and landed in a tangled heap upon the deputy. As the yegg raised his head there sounded from the murk behind—seemingly very near at hand—the weird shriek of the prison siren. Low, sullen, savage at first—a deep roar of angry protest.

Then, gathering in volume and increasing rapidly in pitch and intensity, it arose to a piercing falsetto shriek. In it there was an inferno of seething rage, of bitter resentment, of swift reprisal. And even after it had died away to a fitful whimpering sob it beat upon the senses of the fugitive with loud insistence.

The master crook leaned slightly forward, a strained, hunted look on his thin face.

Again it came—and yet again.

The yegg cowered back like an animal at bay. Then as the siren again sent forth its strident, inhuman cry, he half arose, his face working strangely. He raised both knotted fists and impotently anathematized the spot whence the eerie wail proceeded.

"—— yuh! —— yuh —— yuh!"

Double Jinx pulled him down.

"Shut up!" he cried hoarsely. "We'll beat them yet. We'll change our rig here. Better now than later."

He drove the car to the side of the road where a thick growth of bushes would screen the lights. He switched on the electrics, laid a lap-robe in the path of light beside the bushes, and began swiftly to undress. The yegg, having opened the bundles, followed suit.

They changed quickly and silently. The master crook cut off the tags from his suit and handed the knife to the yegg. The latter, when he had done the same, slipped the knife into his pocket.

Ever mindful of details, Double Jinx rubbed his suit over a rail of the fence to remove the creases and newness. Having affected the change, even to the collar and cravat, he disposed the purloined possessions of the deputy in his pockets and waited impatiently for the yegg to finish.

The suit fitted the master crook to perfection. He carried it with the easy grace of one accustomed to the little niceties of dress. In it he looked anything but the man whose ruthless brutality had terrorized a city.

The yegg, on the other hand, looked more the thug than ever. The new suit and white, collarless shirt seemed to accentuate the coarseness of his projecting jaw, sensuous lips and shelving forehead. He looked and felt acutely uncomfortable in his new attire. The master crook's air of ease subtly irritated him. He felt a growing resentment spring up in him. He nursed it unreasoningly.

"Get a move on," broke in the hard voice of Double Jinx. "We've got to get out of this. Stow the rest of the stuff below the cushions. Hustle!"

He himself gathered their discarded prison clothes into a bundle and hurled it far into the thicket.

"What's the lay now?" asked the yegg, as they resumed their places in the car.

"Burlingame, after we hit the main road," answered the crook shortly.

"Gona take the dep an' Runt wid yuh? Why not crack 'em on the bean an' dump 'em here."

"You simp! The dep is my trump card if we run into trouble. I'm not through with him yet. He's got a lot coming to him," he finished grimly.

AFTER a slow, toilsome run in the dark they emerged upon the main road that led to Burlingame, a manufacturing town of considerable size, boasting three railroads that offered speedy

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transportation outside of the State. Here the crook had perforce to switch on the lights, although they were a hindrance rather than an aid to their progress, because of the heavy fog.

It seemed as if they were hurling themselves against a snowbank that ever receded as the car advanced. Yet not for an instant did the master crook check his headlong speed. Time was incalculably precious. Even though the hunt for him would be concentrated about the Big City, he felt that the farther away he was by morning the less would be the chances for his apprehension.

The next village, Mayfair, confirmed his supposition that the penitentiary drag-net had not been cast in that direction. They passed down the main street without molestation and were again skimming smoothly along in the country.

The yegg felt himself growing drowsy. The relaxation after the period of high tension, the rush of air and the monotonous drone of the motor, conspired to make him forgetful of time, place and responsibility.

He slipped down in the seat, his head nodded on his breast, his hand relaxed its grip on the Runt's knee—he was fast asleep.

The Runt felt the pressing fingers loose their hold. He waited until his straining ears caught the regular breathing of his guardian, then softly inch by inch he wriggled to the other side. By some strange alchemy of fate his craven fear was changed to hardy resolution.

He had tugged at his bonds with feverish energy when the convicts had halted to change their clothes, feigning insensibility when the yegg had returned too soon for him to effect his escape. Since then he had waited impassively for his opportunity.

He freed his hands deftly and removed the gag from his mouth. Directly in front of him, so close indeed that he could have stretched forth his hand and touched him, the master crook sat hunched over the steering-wheel.

The Runt knew that detection for him would mean swift annihilation. Cold terror gnawed at his vitals; yet he forced himself to unbutton the curtain above the door.

He dared not open the door for fear of attracting the master crook's attention, so he lifted his leg over it and felt for the running-board. He encountered it after a lurch of the car had almost thrown him headlong. Carefully he drew over the other leg and clinging to the door with both hands he crouched low.

The road streaked by below him at an appalling rate of speed. The swish, swish of mud and water terrified him. He shut his eyes, drew a shuddering breath—and jumped.

THE yegg awakened to the chill wet breeze lapping his cheek. The curtain on the farther side, loosened from its fastening, flapped wildly in the rush of the car. He wondered dully how it had opened, groping blindly for the Runt the while.

His outstretched hands encountered only the clammy leather cushions. At his feet the deputy stirred uneasily. Then suddenly the reason for the flapping curtain startled the yegg into an exclamation of rage and disgust. The Runt had fled!

He reached forward and laid a hand on the master crook's shoulder.

"Stop!" he yelled into his ear.

At the cry the master crook brought the machine to a protesting, sliding stop.

"What's up?" he demanded abruptly.

It needed but a glance into the rear compartment to confirm the fear that had flashed over him the moment the yegg's startled cry reached his ears. Hot anger at the bungler's carelessness whelmed him. He lunged savagely with his fist. It caught the yegg on the cheek, sending him in a heap against the cushions.

"—— you!" he gritted. "How'd he get away? When?"

The yegg spat the blood from his mouth and retreated farther into his corner.

"Don't know," he answered sullenly. "Shut my peepers a second an' when I opened 'em again he wuz gone. Wuz here a' right when we passed t'rough de boig."

For a moment the big crook was nonplussed, and then his alert brain came to the rescue. It would be worse than useless, he figured, to retrace their route. The leap from the rapidly moving car might have killed the Runt. If so, it was well. If not, their only course was to get to Burlingame as quickly as possible.

He relieved his feelings in a volley of stinging curses, which the yegg swallowed in silence, though thoughts of murderous assault ran riot in his brain. With a final profane admonition to take better care of

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the deputy, the big crook settled back behind the wheel.

He drove recklessly now, burning up the miles that lay between him and his goal. He met no vehicles. If the worst came to the worst, he resolved to use the deputy as a shield and fight his way through. He must reach the town at all hazards. And even while his house of cards came tumbling down about his ears his iron resolution never wavered.

He stopped the car when within a mile of Burlingame. By dint of much straining, sweating and futile cursing they transferred the deputy to the seat beside the master crook. The yegg held him to keep him from falling out, since he was still in a semi-comatose condition.

The big crook slipped the automatic into his breast pocket where it would be immediately available; and thus prepared to run the gauntlet if necessary, he let the car out.

His precautions proved needless, however. The street by which they entered the town was apparently deserted. Double Jinx, immeasurably relieved, turned the car into a shadowy cross-street that ran parallel to the railroad-tracks. It was a district of lumber-yards and warehouses.

He drove slowly with muffled engine, peering keenly into the darkness about him. At length he gave an exclamation of satisfaction and turned into what appeared to be an abandoned brick-yard.

Near by a blur of red and green lights marked the E. J. & C. freight-yards. Switch-engines with bells clanging ceaselessly and whistles tooting warningly scurried hither and thither. The crash of car against car, followed by the jangling of drawbars, went on unintermittently. They passed around a long, low pile of rubbish.

Before them yawned an empty storage-shed, into which Double Jinx carefully nursed the car, afterward shut off the engine and switched off the lights.

He descended stiffly to the ground. The yegg followed.

"Wut now?" he asked gruffly.

"Come along."

Double Jinx removed one of the oil lamps from its bracket on the side of the car and passed out of the shed. Fifty feet away lay a small, squat building that evidently had been the office when the brick-yard was in operation. A wabbly door stood half open. Double Jinx kicked it wide and entered. He struck a match and lighted the lamp.

A rough table and several boxes were the only articles in the room. A shade sagged half-way down over the only window. The accumulated dust and cinders of many months covered all. He set the lamp carefully on the table and, stepping to the window, drew the shade. Dust fell in a shower.

"This used to be the hang-out of the box-car gang. Lefty Logan told me about it," the crook explained.

"Huh-huh!" The yegg's cheek throbbed painfully. "Wut yuh gona do to de de'ty?" he inquired.

"We'll carry him in here and then you'll see," was the thin-lipped reply.

The yegg's face blanched. He stepped back a pace.

"Yuh ain't gona —— No! No moider fer mine."

"No one's going to murder him, you white-livered rat. I'm going to give him a taste of what they gave me at the pen after I get him in here. Come on!"

The last was more than a command. The yegg weakened.

Together they carried the limp form of the deputy from the car and dumped him unceremoniously upon the floor. He moaned. A tremor of returning consciousness passed over him. Double Jinx slipped the gag from his victim's jaws and closed the door. He stood looking at the huddled object a moment, his hard eyes glinting with fiendish anticipation.

The yegg watched him and as he noted the thin, cruel lips and the gloating eyes he reflected dully that he would rather be the Runt lying by the roadside with a broken neck than the huddled man at their feet.

THE Runt, however, had not broken his neck. When he made that desperate leap into the dark he landed on his feet, rolled over once or twice and came to a stop in a puddle of water.

He flexed his legs and arms, hesitatingly at first, and then more boldly when he found no bones were broken. He arose unsteadily to his feet, swaying a little as he pumped great drafts of air into his tortured lungs. Then he started on a shambling run toward Mayfair.

Twenty minutes later, hatless and breathless, his clothes smeared with mud, he staggered into Mayfair's general store.

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The proprietor, the sole occupant of the store at the time, cast one glance at the wild-looking figure and ducked behind the counter. When he bobbed up again he held in his hands a sawed-off shotgun.

"Hands up!" he roared.

The Runt immediately reached for the ceiling. He tried to speak, but his labored lungs and dry throat denied articulation.

"You did get this far, eh, my fine jail-bird? Well, you're going right back, my man. Stand where you are and keep your hands up!"

He stepped behind the Runt and ran his hand over his clothes in a vain search for weapons. Then the Runt found his tongue. Incoherently at first, but rapidly gaining in lucidity as he proceeded, he poured forth his story. A small knot of men who had dropped into the store one by one during his recital pressed about him, hanging on his every word. Now one of them volunteered:

"That's right. I saw a big black car pass through here a half hour or more ago."

"Telephone to the police at Burlingame to be on the lookout for them," suggested another, making for the telephone.

"That won't help," interjected the Runt. "They're either past Burlingame by this time or they're hiding out somewhere in the town until they can get away by train. If I know anything of the big crook, the police will have as hard a time finding him as they'd have finding a needle in a haystack. But—," and his eyes lighted with a gleam of inspired hope—, "he can't get away from me. Gimme a lantern, quick!"

He snatched the lantern that was offered and hurried out, the men trailing at his heels.

He walked slowly up the right-hand side of the road, swinging the lantern from side to side. Suddenly he stooped.

"See!" he shouted. "They can't get away from me!"

He pointed to an irregular depression in the smooth track made by an automobile tire. A yard and a half farther ahead he pointed out another.

"That was made by the right hind wheel of the deputy's car. A couple of days ago I had a blow-out and I fixed it with a patch. There's the mark. Get a car and we'll follow them wherever they may have gone. Telephone to the police at Burlingame and at all the near-by towns. Hurry, hurry, hurry!"

The weak-kneed trusty had suddenly become possessed of the strength of leadership. The men scurried about in obedience to his commands.

In an incredibly brief space of time two automobiles, loaded with men armed to the teeth, were flying toward Burlingame. The Runt drove the first car. He crowded on full speed, never pausing until he came to a cross-road. A hasty inspection of the road ahead revealed the fact that the car he was pursuing had kept undeviatingly on its course to Burlingame.

Then on again through the swirling fog, while the motor sang a wild, exultant chant of triumph in the Runt's ears. They entered the town, and here the Runt slowed down, searching keenly in the maze of tracks for the tell-tale imprint. He found it at length and followed it with little difficulty. The searchlights brought it out as sharply as if it had been silhouetted on a screen.

He turned into the street of warehouses and lumber-yards with the feeling that he was nearing the end of the trail.

APPROXIMATELY three-quarters of an hour earlier, in the brickyard office the big crook was bending over the sprawled-out form of the deputy.

"He'll come to again in a minute," he stated, rising to his feet. "That little dose was just a beginning," he added, an insinuation of future brutality in his tone. He took out the deputy's watch and consulted it.

"The Flyer stops for water at the tank in ten minutes, according to Lefty Logan's information," he said to the yegg. "You can get on if you're careful. You'll be outside of the State by morning." He went to the window facing the railroad tracks and pointed.

"There's the tank. Now beat it."

The yegg stood shuffling his feet nervously. His sloping forehead was wrinkled in thought.

"Wut yuh gona do?" he asked, his eyes narrowing with suspicion.

"You're going West. I go East on the Overland."

"I'll need some o' dat kale," ventured the yegg, stubbornly standing his ground.

He thrust his hands belligerently into his coat-pockets. A galvanic shock tingled from his finger-tips to his shoulder as his right hand came in contact with a smooth, cold object. It was the deputy's knife! He

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edged closer to the table. The big crook put his hand into his pocket. "Here!" he said. "Now beat it before I smash your face.

The yegg counted the handful of silver.

"One eighty-five! *One eighty-five!* An' yuh wid a roll big enough t' choke a bull." A red mist floated before his eyes. "Keep y' —— char'ty!"

With all the strength that bitter spite could lend to his arm he hurled the coins full in the crook's face. Double Jinx, taken unawares, fell back. It was the first time in his lurid career that any one—with the exception of the prison officials—had dared to offer him open violence.

It took him an instant to collect himself, to call back his scattered wits; and in that instant the yegg was upon him, hacking savagely at his unprotected throat with the deputy's knife. The narrow, three-inch blade flashed through the linen collar as if it were paper. Three times it was buried to the haft before the big crook could throw his left arm around the yegg and crush him against his chest.

Then coolly, deliberately, he drew the automatic and pressed it against the yegg's side. His finger curled about the trigger. The little gun barked spitefully, rapidly. The yegg straightened up—then slid limply from the encircling arm and collapsed.

The empty automatic dropped from the crook's hand. He coughed chokingly. He groped his way to the table and sprawled over it. His head sank on his arms. He lay quiet, as one who is very tired.

WHEN the Runt and the posse burst into the office a half hour later, they found the deputy in his corner, gazing at the quiet figures and grinning mirthlessly as at some grim jest of the gods.

A MAKER OF WARS

by

Edgar Wallace

THIS is a story in which my friend Sanders appears very dimly, though he has perhaps the most reliable of all the data connected with the famous Linchela Rebellion.

The rebellion could not have happened in any of Sanders' districts, for the Commissioner would have taken William James Gill and have fired him out of the country. For Sanders had no sense of humor where his own people were concerned.

There is a strip of country that lies contiguous to the Congo basin and German Africa. Its exports are slaves for the cocoa-fields, its imports are mainly gin; all this you may discover in most of the learned geographies in the chapters on "The Civilization of Africa." Some say that there are parts of that wild country that have never been tamed. Certainly from time to time Portugal sends a few hundred soldiers who land at Samades, and march into the interior for the purpose of subjugating the natives. I have never heard that any of them returned.

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Because of this perpetual unsettlement, the Linchela Rebellion was always possible —in Linchela. If William James Gill had not exploited it, I do not doubt but that somebody else would have done so.

William James Gill, being accepted as the fool of the family, set his heart upon being a pirate; his father, being the bigger fool, chose the Church for his son. By some misadventure William James found to his unbounded surprise that he had passed the necessary examination that took him to the Ecclesiastical College at Philadelphia. When he recovered from his astonishment he ran away.

He had outgrown his early desire for piracy, but in a letter written from Boston to his outraged parent he expressed, *inter alia*, his intention of making a fortune in the wilds of Africa. His father hastened to inform him that he had cut him out of his will, and out of his heart, but this trite, theatrical, and pompous announcement was returned through the mail, William James having sailed by a Cunarder for the West Coast of Africa.

It may be said, and it is indeed urged as an explanation of William J. Gill's departure from convention, that he had fallen under the influence of a returned missionary lecturer at college and had gathered from that gentleman an enthusiasm for Africa, without that exalted desire for the natives' welfare which should have formed part of his spiritual equipment.

THE conversation between William and the Elder-Dempster agent at Liverpool is a sad commentary on the ignorance of the modern young man and the value of a university education.

"I'm going to Africa," said William, with the high light of resolve in his nice blue eyes.

"Yes, sir," said the agent and waited.

"Africa," repeated William with an air of finality.

"Dahka, Sierra Leone, Flagstaff, Bassam, Lagos, Boma, St. Paul de Loanda, Benguella, Mossamedes?" recited the agent patiently. He was getting perilously near the end of the Elder-Dempster itinerary.

"St. Paul de Loanda," hesitated William, "that sounds all right." So he took his ticket.

The Cape Verde Islands, no less than the Grand Canaries, were exactly as William James had pictured them, but Sierra Leone came as a shock. He had thought of this place conventionally as "the white man's grave"—a stretch of yellow sand under a hot sun with palm trees and things. Instead there arose out of the seas to his astonished gaze a great mountain covered with verdure, with tiny white houses on its slopes and a prosperous little city at its base.

"This can't be Sierra Leone!" he said in amazement.

Then somebody explained to him that "Leone" meant "lion" and "Sierra" meant "mountain" in the Spanish tongue, and that "Sierra Leone" meant the "Mountain of the Lion."

William James was tremendously impressed, and made a note of the interesting fact in his diary. Little Bassam was more like the coast of his dreams. The ship landed forty huge barrels. They were roped together and made a monstrous string of beads as a panting tug hauled them to the shore.

"What might they contain?" asked William.

His informant said tersely, "Rum," and added "for the natives."

This was the beginning of the boy's education. It was continued at Loanda, where he went to make his fortune, and found that while a fortune might be made in the course of time, the hotels charged at the rate of twelve shillings during the period of waiting.

Life would be very pleasant if the unhappy patches could be d——d. It is infinitely more simple to write of the education of W. J. than it would be to experience it. He found a job at twelve pounds a month transport-riding to the Katanga. . . . When he recovered from his fever, he went with a Portuguese half-breed down on to the Kalahari edge of Angola. . . . Fortunately he was found in time by a patrol of the B. B. P.

He explained to the corporal that the Portuguese gentleman had deserted him, carrying away his supplies, his rifle and ammunition, and the rest of his visible means of support.

SO W. J. had wandered on and on, living on the charity of natives (there was a palaver at one village, did he but know it, and the question of "chopping" W. J. was vigorously debated).

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Then he came to the edge of the Kalahari and foolishly assayed the crossing.

. . . . . stands for a torturing thirst, a maddening torment of misery, a sun that blistered, and everlasting Dust-Devils.

"How you got out of that streak alive beats me," said the admiring N. C. O. of the Bechuanaland Border Police.

"He's born to be hung, Gus," said his familiar.

At Cape Town, W. J. found temporary work in an Adderly Street store. This was twelve months later and he had come to the Cape via Taungs, Vlerksdorp, Johannesburg, Vlerksdorp again, Kimberley and De Aar. At De Aar, weary of walking, he found shelter in an empty railway wagon. He was wakened in the night by some very unpleasant shunting operations, went to sleep again, and woke up to find himself traveling at thirty miles an hour en route for Cape Town.

Here he lived by contributing the story of his experiences to the *Cape Argus* at three cents a line, but there was no regular post for him. Men were wanted for the new railway from Lobito Bay to Katanga, so he drew his month's salary, took a ticket for Lobito Bay (he knew all the ports by heart now) and left Cape Town on a floundering tramp steamer, with light heart.

Ernest Frederick Gill, W. J.'s father, never referred to his son; Millicent Mary Gill, W. J.'s mother, used to weep in secret, and had sundry premonitions that her son was dead.

She had these on an average twice monthly.

She knew nothing of W. J.'s adventures, because the only letters he ever wrote were posted at Loanda, where their bulky appearance attracted the attention of a postal official at that port, and they were opened. Finding no tightly packed bank-notes, as he had expected, he put the letters in the fire. So W. J.'s mother knew nothing of the doings of Loanda.

Naturally she did not hear of the trip to Lobito Bay, and how, not finding work, W. J. started to tramp across country to Rhodesia, or of how W. J. came upon his friend, the half-breed Portuguese.

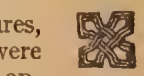
She knew nothing of the explanations and the voluble excuses the Portuguese offered, or of how W. J. G. jerked out a revolver and shot Senhor Saumarez through the stomach. Even the Angola authorities know nothing of this.

It is a far cry from Angola to Big River, but a farther walk. W. J. reached the little strip of Portuguese territory, worked steadily round it, and came into British territory on the other side.

I will not disclose the name of the Coast town, because the citizens might not like it. I will call it Umtambo, and tell you it was a township which had grown up around a rich little West African gold-mine; that it boasted a hotel, a court-house, a newspaper and a jail; and that it stood in that part of the world for "civilization" because there was a land wire which connected it with an Eastern Telegraph Cable Station and so with the outer world.

William J. Gill, with a bunch of modest whiskers obliterating the firm line of his jaw, wandered all round the town, looking for work; but he had arrived in an evil hour, when the Government was debating the question of the new gold-law, and work had been suspended until the question of Retrospective Taxation had been finally settled.

Sitting in the shadow of the white court-house, wondering where his dinner was coming from, and gazing pensively at the big toe that peeped through his dilapidated right boot (this would have shocked Millicent Mary Gill almost as much as the shooting of Saumarez) he was beckoned by a young man, in the whitest of white helmets, who was reclining in a hammock swung upon a pole which two sweating natives bore.



"HI!" SAID the young man.

"Go to thunder," said W. J. sourly.

"You have just come through Linchela's country?" shouted the youth. William J.'s form of address brought no sense of novelty.

"Yas," drawled W. J.

"Heard anything about the fightin'?"

"Ya-as," said W. J.

"Then you're the man!" said the youth, and recklessly rolled out of the hammock. He introduced himself as the editor and part-proprietor of the Umtambo *Message*, and seating himself by W. J.'s side prepared to make a note.

"Steady your horse," said the young man from the Theological School at Philadelphia. "Where do I come in?"

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"If your stuff is worth printing, I'll stand you a drink," said the young man magnificently, and William James Gill guffawed.

"I'll see you in the hot water-tight bulkheads of steaming Hades," said W. J. picturesquely, "before I let you pick my brains for a three-real drink. I'll see you saggin'——"

"Let us talk business," said the young man earnestly. He explained that in addition to being editor and part-proprietor of the Umtambo *Message* he was Umtambo correspondent for most of the papers that are issued in Fleet Street, some that were published in New York, and by virtue of a certain agency, for nearly every country paper in the United States of America.

Whereupon W. J. struck a bargain. For two pounds gold, a week's board and lodging, and a new pair of boots, he told the thrilling story of the Linchela Rebellion, of the turmoil, the burnings, killings, raids, massacres, that had been features of the outbreak. It was dead easy.

"This is my *forte*," said William to himself. "I can live on—what did he call the hog?—Linchela, for months."

SO THE editor of the Umtambo *Message* sent a wire to his various New York and London newspapers and to his agency that began "Intrepid explorer, William James Gill, arrived from Linchela country, tells thrilling story of massacre——"

"And who in sin is William James Gill?" asked thirty-five cable editors simultaneously.

Ernest Frederick Gill, reading his Philadelphia *Record* the following morning, said "Ha!" and folded his paper to read more comfortably, and the family of Gills that sat round the breakfast table preserved a respectful silence, as was its wont when E. F. Gill condescended to read things aloud from his newspaper.

"Ha!" said E. F. Gill again.

"There is some news about a war." He mumbled through an introductory paragraph, and began:

"Associated Press correspondent at Umtambo wires: 'The intrepid and famous traveler, William James Gill——' "

He stopped.

"William James Gill?" he repeated like a man in a dream.

"It's not Willie?" fluttered Millicent Mary, on the verge of tears.

"William James Gill?" repeated the head of the family slowly. "That's very curious. I've never heard of any other William James Gill."

(Which was exactly what thirty-five cable editors had said, only *they* omitted the word "other.")

"If it is Willie," said Mr. Gill, senior, "and I don't see why it shouldn't be—— The boy has any amount of grit, determination, initiative. He comes," said E. F. modestly, "from a stock which has given, time after time, its best work to the service of the State."

(E. F.'s grandfather had held a post of honor in the New York Sanitary Department.)

It was Willie, of course. William James, sitting in Umtambo's best hotel, was famous without realizing it. Numerous cable editors wired furiously to the editor of the Umtambo *Message*, and their messages were to this effect:

Send Gill back to Linchela country; get good exclusive story for us.

The Government at Lisbon wired to the Governor at Linchela to the following effect:

What is this story about rising in Linchela country? Thought it was squashed.

To which the Governor replied that it was squashed, and that any statement to the contrary was "a lie."

His Britannic Majesty's Commissioner, Sanders, at this moment was making his leisurely way toward the border of that very country which was, for the moment, filling the eye of Europe.

His services had been needed to settle a matter of importance (the story of I'febi, the unfortunate wife of Eyoka, is too long to introduce here) and he was steaming north in his tiny sternwheeler when the news came to him of the Linchela Rebellion. With the news came two companies of Houssas and three machine-guns.

Sanders, when he had recovered from his astonishment, laughed.

"You can take your Houssas back again," he said to the officer in charge. "There is no trouble in the Linchela country. I have a most knowledgeable chief who lives on the borders—Bosambo of the Ochori. That he is a liar I know; that he is happy in the spreading of false news I have reason to

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believe. But since he derives no small profit by stealing from the Linchela folk, I am satisfied that there is no rebellion in the country, otherwise he would have informed me."

So the Houssas went reluctantly home again, and Sanders continued northward, unperturbed, for such rumors of risings and rebellions were common.

By this time William James was also on his way to the Linchela country with strict instructions to get exclusive stories for the *Daily Times*, the *Telegram*, the *Standard-News*, the *Evening Post*, the *Morning Mail*, and several other papers.

William J. Gill—never having been in the Linchela country before and never having heard of it until the devil put it into his heart to invent grisly scenes for the edification of a young editor and part-proprietor—found some difficulty in reaching his objective.

WHEN he did, he discovered Linchela in the innocent pursuit of domestic happiness, and the warriors, on whose ferocity he had erected the fabric of his story, peaceably engaged in the Central African equivalent for draw poker.

"This will never do," said the shocked W. J., and saw the chief, the great Linchela himself.

"War?" said the chief. "Master, there is peace in the land. Linchela's heart is soft toward the Portuguese, his hand is outstretched in friendship, his feet turn——"

"When you've finished this anatomical palaver," said W. J. coldly, "will you be good enough to listen to reason?"

And W. J. spoke eloquently of the valor of the chief's people, of how their enemy's hearts turned to water at the sight of them, and what a wicked waste it was possessing all these qualifications for riotous living, if Linchela let his people stagnate.

The chief listened in silence.

"Master," he said, when W. J. had finished, "I am for peace. I love the Portuguese——"

"That is not only a lie, but an unnatural one," said W. J. warmly. "And what matters it if you are at peace with the Portuguese? Are there not other folk? Is it not common talk throughout all these lands that the Ochori who live on your borders have goats and women for the lifting?"

"Master," said the chief of the Upper Linchela people, and he spoke with some sadness, shaking his head, "the Ochori are no meat for us. Once *cala-cala* they were ripe for the plucking, but now *ko-kol* they prick the hand.

"Listen, Master, there is a chief in Ochori who is a white man, being half-brother in blood to the English General at Grand Bassam—so Bosambo told me himself—and he is a warrior. Once I raided the Ochori not knowing of this great chief, and he put shame upon me, kicking me and beating me with a stick and other abominable things."

W. J. nodded.

He returned to Umtambo with six separate and distinct stories of assaults, repulses, heroisms, barbarities, and desolations, and the editor and part-proprietor fell on his neck and advanced him eighty pounds on account of expenses.

For six months he kept the Linchela country in a state of uproar. Sometimes whole districts would be devastated, sometimes the natives would storm a Portuguese fort, sometimes (when he was in a generous mood) they would be repulsed with slaughter. After a while he had earned enough money from his correspondence to buy a half share in the Umtambo *Message*. Also he bought a gold watch and chain and a house. Best of all, one night he bought the bank in a hot game of baccarat and took twenty-four hundred pounds out of the citizens of Umtambo. The war with Linchela nearly came to an abrupt end, there being no further occasion to continue the same.

"My son?" said E. F. Gill proudly. "Yes, William James Gill, the great explorer and correspondent, is my son." He was on his vacation, testing the joys of the simple life on a New England farm.

He spoke to the representative of the Clay County *Herald*, which was a sort of civilized Umtambo *Message*.

"He was originally intended for the Church, but his mind running upon adventure, I sent him to Africa, where, after holding a Government appointment, he set out on behalf of the Government to make a report on the minerals of Rhodesia——"

You will observe there are certain qualities that all the Gills possess in common.

IT WAS in vain that Portugal protested that there was no war, in vain that they brought home the Chief of Linchela himself to prove it. (W. J.'s

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scathing exposure of that trick was a notable contribution to the literature on the subject.) It was in vain that independent investigators penetrated to the Linchela country, and wrote fluent and special articles in the *Diario de Lisboa* on the peaceful condition of the land.

"Hireling pens," said W. J. scornfully, and sent a column news-letter descriptive of a raid made upon the Portuguese camp and the annihilation of the European force.

"In my ears," wrote W. J., "still ring the fierce shouts of the painted warrior, the boom of the tom-tom as it led them at the attack. I hear again the shrill cries for mercy——"

In the end Portugal conferred with London, and London communicated with Washington, and Washington, who knew more of the facts than most Government offices, chuckled, but cabled "Bounce him."

There came to Sanders one morning a big envelope marked "confidential." Sanders was at headquarters when it arrived, and he read the contents with a wicked smile. He embarked upon the gunboat which had brought the letter, and went straight to Umtambo, which is three hundred miles by sea.

He found William James Gill in the act of writing a leader for the *Message* on "Government Morality." Sanders nodded as he entered the hot little office and asked W. J. if he would come outside. The editor and complete proprietor (as he was now) accepted the invitation.

"The fact of the matter is, Mr. Gill," said the Commissioner, going straight to the point, "we are getting rather tired of this war of yours."

"Not mine, I guess," W. J. hastened to remark.

"Yours," said the Commissioner firmly. "The description of the Portuguese attack on Linchela's village could only have been written by a man who knew as much about military tactics as a cow does of painting china."

W. J. got very red.

"But, apparently," Sanders went on coldly, "Portugal is not amused, and what is worse than all, their papers are taking your war seriously and are attacking the Government for hushing it up."

"Well?" said W. J.

"Well," said Sanders, "I am instructed that you are a gentleman of infinite tact and judgment. You know the country, you know Linchela, you know the cause of the war."

"Naturally," said W. J., and coughed.

"What I want you to do," said the Commissioner, "is to go down into the Linchela country and settle the war. Settle it for good, and I will pay you on behalf of our friends a fee of three thousand pounds. They will throw in a couple of decorations if they have any fascination for you."

"But," said W. J., "on what basis do you fix my remuneration at three thousand pounds.

Sanders did not smile.

"They regard this as your war. They will give you three-years' purchase. Is it a deal?"

"It's a deal," said W. J., and shook hands on the bargain.

W. J. NOW lives in Erie, Pennsylvania. Proud inhabitants point out his house to you.

"That's William James Gill's house, sir," they will say, "the great war correspondent, that settled the war in Africa."

It was suggested by old man Gill, in an interview which appeared in an Erie paper, that for his services in the interests of peace W. J. was entitled to the consideration of the Nobel trustees. But somehow the Nobel prize never came to Erie, Pennsylvania. W. J. bore the neglect philosophically.

He cherished much higher, as he said himself, speaking at a party given in his honor, the embroidered motto worked and presented to him by the Y. W. C. A. of his native town, "Blessed are the Peacemakers."

But then, of course, W. J. had been intended for the Church.

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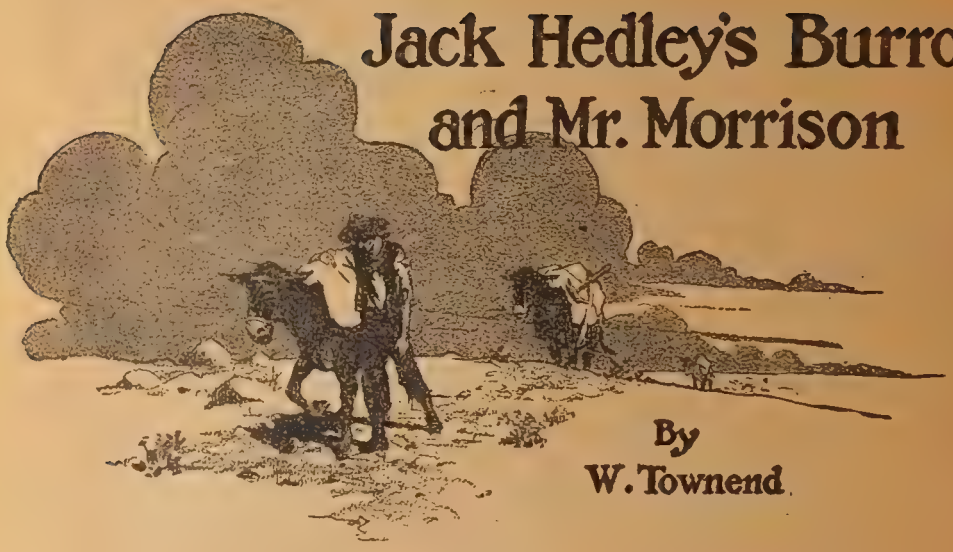
Jack Hedley's Burros and Mr. Morrison



By W. Townend

AS A BRANDING-IRON on the flank of a yearling, so does the desert leave its mark on man. There is no escape from this. Only some men are more heavily branded than others.

Those that know will tell you that once a man has lived and toiled and suffered on the desert he is lost. He may pray to be delivered, as from temptation or sin or a nagging wife; and yet if his prayer be answered he has thrown aside all hope of happiness deliberately and is of all men the most miserable. To the day of his death there will be in his heart a craving for the sand and greasewood, and the bare, brown rocks and mountains, and the blue sky and the sun, and the blistering, stabbing heat. And life will be empty—as cruel and hard and as bare of all comfort as the desert itself.

But for the most part the man who has breathed deeply of the desert air stays on the desert. And though he may say that he is going away soon—next year, or next month, or next week, maybe—he never does. Nor does he even try. The very thought of living elsewhere is impossible.

And so it was with Jack Hedley in the town of Paradise Crossing, so called by some cynic in the dead-and-gone days when the borax-teams still traveled across the desert from Death Valley to the railroad. For whenever Jack Hedley spoke of the time when he would be able to leave the desert there was not one of the inhabitants of Paradise Crossing, numbering as a general rule less than a dozen souls, who believed him. He had lived too long on the desert to be happy away from it.

Not that he had ever said much as to his own history. A silent man, very lean and withered and tanned like a piece of old leather, he would sit for hours with a newspaper and his pipe, and take no part in the conversation unless spoken to. People knew that he had been born in Ireland; he had told them that much at least. They knew also that he had had a claim near Orde Mountain ten years before the Santa Fé had reached Daggett, and that he had drifted into Los Angeles one Winter when that city was little more than a small Mexican village with a plaza and a church.

And it was common knowledge in Paradise Crossing that since then Jack Hedley had prospected all over the Mohave and Colorado Deserts, from the Greenhorn Mountains and the Sierra Madre and San Bernardino through Death Valley as far as White River and Desert Valley and the Mormon Mountains in Nevada. Sometimes, indeed, they used to wonder if there were any place on the desert that had not, at one time or another, been visited by Jack Hedley and his burros.

Jack Hedley's burros alone would have prevented him from ever leaving the desert. For how could a desert burro live in a city? And Jack Hedley had, so he said, set his heart on a small house and a big garden with

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fruit-trees and chickens, just outside Los Angeles or San Diego, with a horse and buggy, and the trolley-cars running past the front door and the paper left every morning by a boy with a bicycle, and the mail-carrier calling two or three times each day. The which was absurd, of course.

NO ONE who does not know the desert will understand this story, which is really the story of the Lost Burro Mine. And the Lost Burro Mine is situated, roughly speaking and according to Dan Watson, somewhere between the Sheephole Mountains and the Colorado. If you look at the map of Southern California you will see for yourself what kind of a description this is, and you may realize also why the Lost Burro Mine is still lost and why Dan Watson has not yet made a fortune out of his property.

Jack Hedley was different from other men. He knew more to begin with, not merely about rock and high-grade ore and color and such-like, but about other things of lesser importance—things that could be of no use either to himself or any one else. And his knowledge was always cropping up in the most unexpected places.

Dan Watson, a philosopher by disposition and a miner by trade, came upon him one afternoon when he was leaning over the gate of his corral gazing at his seven burros.

"Dan," said he after a time, "yuh see this little old burro, Pete, don't yuh? Do yuh know what this means?"

"What's what mean?" asked Dan, taking the pipe out of his mouth.

"This yere cross on Pete's shoulders."

Dan considered a moment and then shook his head.

"I never knew it meant nothin' pertickler. All burros have it, don't they?"

"Not on yer life they don't," said Jack, with a little smile. "An' yuh don't know how it got thar, hey?"

"No," said Dan. "I can't say as I do."

"Well," said Jack Hedley, "the burros that has that cross on their shoulders is descended from the burro that the Lord Jesus rode into Jerusalem on that time he went up to be killed by the Jews."

Dan stared at him with a look of awe-struck amazement.

"Fer Heaven's sake!"

"It's a fact," said Jack. "'Cause why? 'Cause before that no burros never had no cross an' afterwards all burros descended from that one have had it as plain as print."

And he nodded to himself and rubbed Pete's head between the ears.

IT WAS perhaps three months later that Dan Watson, while driving a team of mules toward Paradise Crossing from the mine, overtook Jack Hedley and three of his burros and camped with him at the mouth of a cañon where there was a spring of fresh water.

In the middle of the night he awoke suddenly, and heard some one tiptoeing lightly over the gravel. Rather puzzled, he waited without moving from his blankets, and in a few moments heard Jack Hedley speaking in a low voice.

"Pete," he whispered, "are yuh all right, Pete? An' you, Mike? That's good, old boy!" There was a brief silence, and then: "Why, what yuh doin' over thar, Spot, old sport? Why ain't yuh asleep, hey? Yuh got a hard day ahead uh yuh in the mornin'; yuh wanter git some sleep."

Dan listened with a feeling almost of shame, as if he had overheard something private that was not intended for his ears.

And in the morning as he drove the team across the dry lake to Paradise Crossing he kept pondering on what he had heard. Most men were careful about their burros, of course, but this passed all understanding. Somehow it troubled him. For a man to get up in the middle of the night to talk to his burros and ask them questions as to how they were and why they were not asleep seemed impossible.

In fact, so impossible, that Dan said nothing of what had happened—not even to Joe Harris and Cy Williams, with whom he discussed most things. It was a secret between Jack Hedley and his burros, and he ought not to have heard.

But that same afternoon when Jack Hedley, who had only just got in to Paradise Crossing with his burros, told Joe Harris that he was sick and tired of the desert, Dan scoffed at him openly.

"Yes, siree," said Jack, wagging his head. "Yes, siree, it won't be long before I'm through with the desert fer keeps. When a man gits to my age it's time he had a rest, an' yuh don't git no rest out yere in this everlastin' wilderness. Not on yer life, yuh don't!"

For a minute or so Dan was silent, sitting

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with his back against one of the veranda-posts with his hands clasped about his knees and his lips twisted into a smile. In front of him beyond the railroad stretched the dry lake, a waste of silver-gray, bare of all vegetation, even of sage-brush, and ending in a mirage of shimmering water. Farther off were dark, rock-strewn hills rising out of the sands and long slopes that led gradually up and up to the mountains, all hazy and indistinct against the sky. And this with the small depot, telegraph-poles, and the three tall tanks, was about all that one could see from the veranda of Bronson's store at Paradise Crossing, until Jack Hedley's seven burros came into sight, cropping leisurely at the greasewood.

And then Dan chuckled.

"The desert!" he said with a touch of scorn. "You leave the desert, Jack! Leave nothin'! You'll never leave."

"And why not?" said Jack Hedley quickly, a dusky flush showing in his leathery cheeks. "An' why not? Good God, Dan! Why not? You're another uh them dog-gone young fools that thinks 'cause a man has lived out here most uh his life he never wants to live nowhars else!"

"Yuh won't never leave them burros uh yours, that's why," said Dan dryly.

There were footsteps on the gravel just then—uncertain, wandering footsteps and the voice of one crooning a little, tuneless song.

Jack waited, frowning; and Fat Sam Durnford, who lay on the boards with a broad-brimmed hat over his face, sat up. Presently Cy Williams, a tall, lean, shambling figure, dusty and bareheaded, but smiling as one who walked with the gods, staggered into sight around the corner.

Fat Sam gave a short laugh.

"Fer Heaven's sake!" he said. "Here's Cy Williams again. You go an' lay down, Cy, yuh drunken hawg!"

And from his tone one would have judged Fat Sam a lifelong abstainer; and one would have been wrong. Cy Williams, paying no heed to the rebuke, advanced and gazed at Jack Hedley.

"What's that yuh say, Jack? Leave the —the desert!" And he giggled, with unsober mirth. "How yuh goin' to live?"

Jack Hedley turned to Dan, giving Cy a contemptuous shoulder.

"Listen to me, son," he said. "In a little whiles I'll be out uh this God-awful desert fer good. I've gotten a prospect that makes the best of anythin' else I've seen, Goldfield or Tonopah, look like the tailings from a stamp-mill. Dan, I'm just afraid to say how much a ton that ore uh mine will run! But it's goin' to make a rich man uh me; it sure is. An' it's goin' to git me away from here, an' that's all I care about, anyways. An' when I git that money in me jeans, then I'll buy me that house I've been talkin' about; an' I'll live just near a city, so that I can git in of a night-time an' see the lights an' look at the folks an' feel that I'm alive once more an' not dead an' buried out here away from everything that makes life wuth the trouble uh livin'."

And Jack Hedley stood up and walked slowly off.

"He ain't got no prospect better'n any one else's," said Fat Sam. "If he has, why don't he bring in some uh the dirt an' let's have a look at it?"

"What's the use?" said Dan, after a time. "Even if he has gotten the best claim between here an' Carson City, what's the use? I've heard others say the same things as he done, word fer word. They was through with the desert, an' goin' to settle down in a city, an' not waste their time foolin' 'round after mines; an' what would yuh have to drink—beer or whisky? Then they'd pull out an' we'd feel sorry an' kinder lonesome, until a couple uh months later they'd be back again, as homesick as a five-year-old kid fer his mother. Don't I know? Haven't I done it myself? Three times over. An' come back each time. It 'ull be the same with Jack Hedley, uh course."

"Don't you fellers be too sure," said Joe Harris, a big, raw-boned man who had come in from camp with a poisoned hand. "I shouldn't be a bit surprised if old Jack was tellin' the truth, an' that somewheres a ways out in the desert he's located one uh them mines yuh dream of an' hear of, but never see—a real Bonanza."

"Maybe," said Dan. "Maybe you're right, Joe. There's no tellin'. As a matter uh fact, Jack wouldn't surprise me whatever he done. But there's one thing he won't do —he'll never leave the desert."

On that point Dan was very positive indeed.

"Or if he does," he added, "he'll be back in Paradise Crossing in about ten days or less."

And this was the general opinion of what would happen.

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II

EARLY the next morning Dan drove out of Paradise Crossing back to the mine. But while he was stowing his canteens in the wagon Jack Hedley strolled past, as one who had much leisure on his hands and no cares.

"Oh, Jack!" Dan straightened up and called to him.

"What is it, Dan?"

"When yuh goin' out again?"

"Tomorrer, I guess."

"See here," said Dan. "Why don't yuh bring in some uh the rock from that prospect uh yours? If it's so all-fired good yuh wanter git busy! The sooner yuh make some money the sooner you'll be quit in the desert. Savvy?"

Jack Hedley nodded as if he heard something that had never occurred to him before.

"You're right, son," he said, and tugged at his ragged gray mustache—a sign that he was troubled in his mind. "I'll bring in some specimens. Maybe I can't this time—I ain't goin' to be out but a week; but I will next fer sure."

"An' then," said Dan, "you'll have all the money yuh want, an' I suppose we won't see yuh no more out here, will we?"

He climbed on to the wagon and sat looking down on Jack Hedley, who stood with his hands in the pockets of his overalls and his eyes fixed on the distant hills, all pink and yellow and violet against the deep blue of the sky.

"Maybe yuh won't," he said in a gruff voice, and Dan gathered up the reins and drove off.

At the store he stopped for a moment to speak to Joe Harris.

"Say, Joe, Jack Hedley ain't no more got that prospect he says he has than them burros uh his has got feathers. That was just a gran'stan' play uh his yestuhday, an' don't yuh make any mistake about that."

"How do yuh know?" said Joe Harris, very much interested.

"Easy. He says to me just now that he can't bring in no specimens this trip, but he will next. He ain't got no specimens to bring in, that's why."

"Well, maybe he ain't," said Joe Harris. "But yuh can't never tell, can yuh? Maybe he'll come back with rock that 'ull make him as rich as he wants."

"Guess I'd better be hittin' the trail or they'll be wonderin' what's come to me," said Dan. "See yuh in a week or two, most like. The Snow-Flake 'ull be closed down by then; old man Patterson can't afford to do no more work till the Spring. But there's only the three of us out there, anyways."

And with that Dan cracked his whip and shouted to his team: "Giddup, mules! Giddup!" and started off, laughing to himself. For although, as Dan knew, one should never be too certain about anything, nothing was more certain than that Jack Hedley would make not one cent out of the claim of which he had spoken, even supposing he had such a claim.

The day after Dan departed back to the mine Jack Hedley and three of his burros, Pete and Mike and Spot, left Paradise Crossing, headed south along the dry lake. And he'd be back in a week or ten days, for sure.

Yet when a month later the Snow-Flake Mine had shut down, and Dan Watson, with Dutch Harry and Ben Grier, arrived back in Paradise Crossing, Jack Hedley was still absent.

"He ain't back from that trip uh his," said Fat Sam.

"P'r'aps he's bringin' some uh that rock he's got," said Cy Williams. "It's about time he did, ain't it?"

"It's funny, all the same," said Dan. "I hope the darned old cuss ain't got into no trouble an' hurt himself. Just like him if he has."

He spoke in a careless tone, as if the matter were of no importance, and smiled easily; yet a worried feeling crept over him as he thought of what might have happened out on the desert. For the month was August, and the desert was the desert.

That night at half past nine most of the inhabitants of Paradise Crossing were at the station when the train from the north, a long line of box-cars with a day-coach and Pullman car attached, slowed down and stopped.

"Howdy, boys," said the conductor, making his way to the office. "Any freight for me?"

"Anything for us?" asked Joe Harris.

"Yep. One passenger."

A stout, tall, pink-faced man in a gray suit and straw hat climbed slowly out of the Pullman and stood for a minute or so

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looking about him with an air of one who appreciates his own worth.

"Gee!" said Dan. "What's this? Don't tell me that he's goin' to git off at Paradise!"

The stout man came slowly toward them.

"Could any of you gentlemen inform me where I can find a Mr. Watson?" he asked.

"Why, sure," said Cy Williams, who was sober and in a mood to resent the presence of any man in store clothes. "This is him," he said, and he pushed Dan forward. "What's he been doin'? You're a gum-shoe man, a detective, or a dep'ty sheriff from Inyo County, ain't yuh?"

The stout stranger's pink face went a shade pinker.

"All ab-ooard!" said the conductor. "Good night, boys; see yuh tomorrer." And Number Ten pulled leisurely out of Paradise Crossing.

"Mr. Watson," said the stout stranger with a weak smile, "my name is Morrison. I was told that you could give me a little information about the neighborhood. I'm on my way south from Tonopah, and I thought I'd make inquiries about some property near here." He paused and looked at the circle of faces in the light cast by the station-agent's lantern.

"Is it a mine?" asked Dan curiously.

"Yes. The Golden Cashbox." Again he paused, and his audience grinned in delighted anticipation. "Have you ever heard of it?"

And at that question, so innocently asked by the pink-faced man in the gray suit, there was a chuckle of amusement. Had they ever heard of the Golden Cashbox? Of course they had! Who hadn't? What did the man think they were?

"Why, yes," drawled Dan. "I guess we've heard of it, Mr. Morrison. I guess we all have, around here." He broke off and winked at Cy and the others. "Say, let's go over to the store, Mr. Morrison. Cy, yuh take hold of Mr. Morrison's suitcase."

And with no further delay they trooped across the tracks and the gravel beyond to the store, where they seated themselves on the counter and waited to hear what had brought the stout man to Paradise Crossing on the hottest night that Summer.

"And now," said Mr. Morrison, "you say you've heard of the Golden Cashbox?"

"Did yuh by any chance have any money invested in that, mister?" asked Dan, taking in the stranger's plump, smooth cheeks, his double chin and eye-glasses, and all the other marks of well fed civilization.

"A little," said Mr. Morrison gravely. "Yes, more than a little. In fact, four years ago we bought quite a lot of stock in the—er—company. And so, being in the neighborhood, I thought I'd drop off to make inquiries. They wrote to us a few months ago in connection with a reorganization——" He stopped, his voice drowned in a shout of laughter.

"Why——" Dan choked in helpless mirth. "There never was no Golden Cashbox; not more than two or three holes in the ground over there in the Avawatz, that's all. That doggone Golden Cashbox! Say, them fellers oughter be in the pen, that's where they oughter be. You'll never git nothin' outer that, mister. No, nor no one. There's no one been near it fer two years now, only coyotes and sidewinders."

"Oh!" said Mr. Morrison, nodding his head, and he did not appear to be overdepressed by the news. "I understand. A gold brick, hey? Well, it can't be helped. It wasn't my money," he explained. "Clients of ours; but——" He shrugged his shoulders as one who dismissed the matter completely, smiled and took out his watch. "Can any one tell me when the next train goes south? I've business in Los Angeles, and I'll start as soon as possible. The next train goes——"

"In just about twenty-four hours less ten minutes," said Cy Williams.

"Oh, Lord!" said Mr. Morrison blankly. "Do you mean to say there's only one train a day?"

"Guessed it first time, stranger," said Cy. "Number Nine goin' north; Number Ten south."

"Ah!" said Mr. Morrison. "And the hotel?" And again there was a laugh.

"Gee! Thar ain't none," said Fat Sam with his mouth full of soda-cracker. "Thar's only about nine or ten folks livin' here, an' we don't have no call fer no Ritz-Carltons nor cafeterias, neither, in Paradise Crossing. An' won't have, neither; not till the next boom comes along."

Mrs. Bronson, the wife of the storekeeper, a large, placid, untidy woman, came forward.

"Now, boys," she said, "quit yer joshin'! Mr. Morrison," she said, "we can fix yuh up

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with a room an' yer meals over to our place, if that's what you're worryin' over."

Mr. Morrison looked at the circle of grinning, brown faces; then he chuckled as if the humor of the thing had just dawned on him.

"If they hadn't marked it so very big on the railroad map I shouldn't kick. Boys, I guess the drinks are on me."

AND so Mr. Morrison, having achieved merit, stayed the night in Paradise Crossing; and the next morning Dan Watson found him in his shirt-sleeves seated on the veranda of the store, gazing with a melancholy and perspiring countenance across the desert.

"Mornin'," said Dan, and Mr. Morrison looked up with a smile of recognition.

"Good morning. A fine day, isn't it?" Which was, so Dan reflected, the kind of thing he would say. "Care for a smoke?" And he produced a cigar-case of gold, set with turquoises.

"An' yuh come from—where did yuh say?" Dan asked, hiding his admiration at such evidences of wealth.

"New York," said the plump man with a little homesick sigh. "I'm out West on a business trip. My firm has large interests in Nevada and Arizona."

"Mines, uh course," said Dan, seating himself by Mr. Morrison's side.

"A little," said Mr. Morrison, gazing at Dan out of the corners of his eyes. "Yes, a little, Mister—Mister—— What did you tell me your name was?"

"Watson. Only most fellers calls me Dan. Been out before, Mr. Morrison?"

"You bet I have. Never this part though. And without making comparisons, I do not think it likely at all that I shall come this way again. I am not saying anything against the landscape, which is monotonous, and there's too much of it; or the heat, which if it gets much worse I shall melt; or the sun waking me at four o'clock; or the flies; or—or the water which tastes like a dose of salts, or—or even the Golden Cashbox. But all the same I guess I could never settle down in a place with only one train a day each way. It's too blame hard to get out of. The desert, I take it, has its uses; but I'm glad it's out here and not where I have to live."

Dan put out a huge hand and patted him on the shoulder.

"You're all right," he said, laughing. "Quite all right! An' so's the desert."

"Well," said Mr. Morrison thoughtfully, "I dare say. But what on earth do you fellows do with yourselves out here? That's what I can't understand."

"Mostly we works," explained Dan. "An' we works so doggone hard that we ain't got no time to look at landscapes an' enjoy the scenery. When we ain't workin' we're mostly too tired to do nothin' else but sleep. Swing a seven-poun' hammer all day an' see fer yerself."

"Oh!" said Mr. Morrison. "I see. And you live here all the year 'round in this place and work so hard that——" He was silent for a time, as if letting the fact penetrate into his brain. Then he sighed. "It's funny how men make a living. I don't suppose I could swing a seven-pound hammer twice without going down with apoplexy."

Dan glanced at his plump shape with a grin.

"I dessay yuh couldn't. But then, why should yuh? I have to, an' I bet I can do a heap more things that yuh can't do; but—all the same I don't mind bettin' yuh make about a million times more money a year than I do. An' what's more, I don't blame yuh, neither." He leaned forward suddenly. "See here, Mr. Morrison, I take it that you're what they calls a promoter. Is that right?"

"Why, yes. I guess you might call me one, if you cared to," said Mr. Morrison, smoothing his cheeks carefully.

"Big firm back East, hey?"

"Tolerably."

"Well, see here," said Dan. "It's this that I'm drivin' at. Supposin' that yuh come across something extra special good, Mr. Morrison, in the minin' way, would yuh be persuaded to put up some cash to help development? I've a claim back yonder—copper; runs eighty dollars to the ton, an' it seems to me——" Dan broke off quickly as Mr. Morrison began to shake his head.

"Dan," he said, "it's no good. I'm out of the mining game for keeps. I've seen too much of it. I'm through."

And he closed his mouth with a snap, as if nothing in the world would make him budge one inch from his decision.

"Would nothin' tempt yuh?" said Dan.

"No," said Mr. Morrison; "nothing. Not even chunks of solid gold in loose sand."

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"Well," said Dan with a grin, "that's all right then. I guess, though, from the way the rest uh the boys are hangin' 'round, that you'll have several propositions put up to yuh before yuh leave Paradise Crossin' —all uh them good, all uh them guaranteed to make yuh a fortune. This is the biggest blow we've had since the bottom dropped out uh the last boom."

He walked slowly away, smiling to himself as he saw Cy Williams stroll up and take his place by the side of Mr. Morrison.

About eleven o'clock Fat Sam came into the store.

"Say, fellers, tell me what this is comin' along."

Dan followed him out into the sunlight.

"Look-a thar!" said Sam; and Dan saw just emerging from the mirage four little figures, blurred and indistinct.

"Who is it?" asked Cy, shading his eyes. "Look like they're men, hey?"

"Durned if I know," said Dan, and then he let out a yell. "Why, it's Jack Hedley! That's old Jack with Pete an' Mike an' Spot. Some one git them glasses an' have a look through 'em."

"You're right, Dan," said Joe Harris a little later. "It's Jack all right, him an' his burros. About all in, too."

AND about half an hour afterward Jack Hedley crawled into Paradise Crossing. He was very thin—thinner even than usual, with big hollows in his cheeks and circles under his eyes, and his face and mustache covered with alkali-dust, and his overalls torn to ribbons and showing the bare brown flesh through the rents.

And if there had been any doubt in the minds of those who saw him that he had had a hard journey one glance at the burros would have been sufficient. They were worn out, scarcely able to drag themselves along; their necks drooped and their long ears hung limply.

"Hello, Jack!" said Dan. "Where yuh been? What's wrong?"

"You've traveled the —— of a long ways, ain't yuh?" said Cy.

Jack Hedley shuffled on wearily, paying no heed to the questions they asked, but talking in a low voice to his burros.

"Giddup, Mike, boy. Come on, Spot. You won't never have to do another lick uh work after this as long as yuh live—never another, yuh won't."

Only when Cy Williams told him that they would attend to the burros and that he had better go into the store and have a drink did he show any sign of having heard.

"No," he said. "No one's goin' to look after 'em but me, Cy. They wouldn't like it."

That afternoon when the whole available population of Paradise Crossing was seated in the store listening to Mr. Morrison's tales of the fauna and flora of Broadway, Jack Hedley entered and stood looking from man to man from under his thick gray eyebrows. Then, very deliberately and without saying a word, he made his way between the chairs and dropped a gunny-sack half full of something on to the counter.

"What's the matter, Jack?" said Dan. "What's in the gunny-sack? Brought back any specimens from the Bonanza?"

And at that Jack Hedley found his voice.

"Yes," he said in a husky undertone. "I have. I said I would, an' I have." He drew a deep breath. "An' it's so rich, Dan, I'm about scairt when I try an' think what it's worth. Look at this rock an' see."

He opened the sack and emptied its contents out on to the counter, while the miners crowded around and gazed in speechless wonder at the richest ore ever brought into Paradise Crossing.

For a long time no one spoke, and then at last there came a whisper of "Good God Almighty!" from Joe Harris, and Jack Hedley gave a little laugh.

"See!" he said. "Broke off with a pick," and he held up a piece that was almost solid gold.

"Jack—" said Dan, and his voice seemed to come from a distance—"Jack, is there much more uh this?"

"Yes," he answered, "there is."

"Well, if that's the case," said Dan, "there won't be much trouble about that house uh yours with the chickens an' the fruit-trees. Lord, man! Do yuh know you're rich?"

He felt a hand plucking at his sleeve and heard Mr. Morrison whispering—

"Will you introduce me to your friend, Dan?"

"Sure," said Dan. "Jack, shake hands with Mr. Morrison from New York. This is Jack Hedley, Mr. Morrison."

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. Hedley," said the man from New York, his plump face quivering with excitement. "If you're not

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too busy might I have a few minutes' conversation with you right now? I'm—I'm interested in mines myself, and it seems to me that you've found a wonderfully rich piece of property. Have you any plans yet as regards development?"

And Paradise Crossing knew then that Mr. Morrison of New York was back once more in the mining game.

It was supper-time before Jack Hedley left him.

"Settled anything?" asked Joe Harris.

"Yes," said Jack, "he's goin' to take some uh the rock into Los Angeles, an' he'll be back as quick as he can with a friend uh his next week, or sooner. All depends."

"Good fer you," said Cy Williams. "I always did say that Paradise Crossin' 'ud make a strike one uh these days, an' I was right."

That night Mr. Morrison caught Number Ten south.

AFTER he had gone Jack Hedley and Dan sat on the steps of the freight platform in the moonlight and talked. "You've filed yer location claims, I suppose, ages ago, ain't yuh?" said Dan.

Jack bit off a chew of tobacco and looked at him sidewise.

"Why, no, Dan, no; not yet I ain't."

Dan whistled softly; and it flashed through his mind then that this prospect of Jack Hedley's was not what he had been talking of, but something he had found on the last trip—something fresh altogether.

"Jack," he said, "yuh oughter be careful. Don't do anything silly an' find yerself froze out."

Jack Hedley shook his head.

"No," he said, "I made it plain that I wanted my price. I'll have the papers signed and witnessed. Words don't go."

"You're gittin' a fixed sum down, are yuh?" asked Dan.

"Yuh betcher," said Jack. "An' we'll settle how much later on when he's seen what I've got; an' I'm to keep a share in the mine as well." And then, as Dan was lighting his pipe, Jack pulled something out of his pocket. "Hold that match steady, Dan, an' look what he give me." And he handed Dan a wad of bills. "Thar's two hundred dollars thar," Jack said with a little laugh. "Just as a sort uh first payment to bind the contract."

"Gee!" said Dan, soft-voiced with awe and admiration. "An' bills, too! I ain't seen bills I don't know when. That's like an Easterner all right, not to use gold; ain't it? Carryin' 'round a wad like this!" He paused, deep in thought, and watched the light in the station opposite. "Well, Jack, I'm durned glad. You've worked hard an' it's time some luck was comin' your ways. I guess you'll be leavin' the desert as soon as yuh can, hey?"

Jack Hedley sat with his arms folded across his knees and stared through half-closed eyelids at the mountains beyond the dry lake. He answered with a certain hesitation.

"Yes, Dan, I'll be leavin' purty soon."

"Lookin' forward to that house uh yours in the city, hey?"

"I guess so," said Jack Hedley. "Oh, I guess so!"

Dan laughed.

"I wonder."

And then the older man turned to him.

"Dan," he said, "I've been thinkin'. Maybe yuh think I don't want to leave this God-awful desert. Well, I do. I've been here for—I dunno; it's like a hundred years. I'm just tired. An' now—now I got the chance to go, with this claim uh mine.

"But what if something was to happen to me now, hey? Suppose I was to cash in just when things was comin' my ways! Somehow it wouldn't surprise me any. I ain't never had much luck, Dan—ever. I'm afraid almost to take any risks for fear things—things might happen. Silly uh me, ain't it? But, God! I'd like to live in a city once more, away from here."

He paused and Dan watched him in silence, feeling rather bewildered.

"Dan," he went on, "listen here. I guess I'm a purty ornery old rough-neck, ain't I? It ain't my fault, somehow—but you an' me always hit it off together, don't we? You've done a heap uh things fer me, Dan, an' I'd like to do something fer you in return."

"Fergit it," said Dan tersely. "Talk sense."

"I am," said the other man. "An' what I'm diggin' at is this: If I happen to peg out before that prospect uh mine is opened up, before I handle any uh the money, I'd like it to be yours. It's good, Dan; the best ever. There ain't another in the whole Southwest, I don't believe, one quarter as good as that. An' it's yours if I die. Understand?"

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Dan nodded.

"That's good uh you, Jack, uh course. But there ain't goin' to be no occasion fer me to have it, so let's talk uh something else."

"An'," continued Jack Hedley, "I'm goin' to write down on a piece uh paper that the mine's yours—the Burro Mine, I calls it—an' I'm goin' to give yuh the location whar it is, in case anything happens to me before Mr. Morrison comes back. Then you'll know. Savvy?"

And before Dan could collect his thoughts or say a word the owner of the Burro Mine moved off with a curt "Good night" flung over his shoulder.

III

THERE were few ways of celebrating a great occasion at Paradise Crossing. With a population of about ten human beings and a little more than twice that number of burros one can not have much choice in the way of enjoyment, but Jack Hedley did what was expected of him, and did it in a manner that won the approval of an ever-thirsty community.

Soon after breakfast he was seated in the store with his feet on a box of soap, and a bottle of whisky in his hand. On the counter near him were more bottles, both of beer and whisky, from which he invited the inhabitants to drink, informing each one that there was plenty more, so he need not be afraid. This was, so Paradise Crossing considered, an opportunity not to be neglected, times being hard and money scarce.

Dan Watson shrugged his shoulders when he saw Jack, and then grinned.

"Dan," said Jack Hedley, "what'll yuh have?"

Politeness demanded that he accept hospitality thus offered. Jack's eyes were dull and heavy; his face was flushed under the desert tan; he laughed feebly at his own jokes.

"Well, happy days!" said Dan, drinking out of the bottle.

"Happy days!" said the owner of the Burro Mine. "An' to —— with the desert!"

There was much rejoicing in Paradise Crossing that morning, and Cy Williams and his partner, Fat Sam, who had planned to leave for their claim that forenoon, postponed their departure indefinitely. They could work any time, but the chances for drinking were not so great.

Ben Grier and Dutch Harry, both late of the Snow-Flake Mine, and considering a prospecting-trip into Nevada, fell out over an argument on the situation in Mexico and came to blows before collapsing into deep slumber side by side on the gravel outside the store, while Charlie Smith, the station-agent, unused to liquor, wept bitter tears of loneliness and announced his intention of handing in his resignation to the railroad.

By three o'clock Dan Watson found the dispenser of hospitality also sleeping.

"Reached his limit, has he?" he said. "It goes to his head quicker'n it used to."

"What a day!" said Joe Harris. "Like old times almost, ain't it?"

Dan folded up a gunny-sack and placed it under the sleeping man's head.

"It don't often happen, anyways. You poor old *hombre!* Leave the desert, would yuh? Not while there's any breath in yer carcass yuh won't. An' you'll lay there till evenin', won't yuh? Nothin' will make him move now till night-time, an' he'll wake up then an' want to know what's been happenin' an' why he's here an' how it is he's got a mouth on him like the inside of an old hat. You'll see if he don't."

AND to a certain extent Dan was right. About two hours later, when he was seated outside the side-door of the store, talking with Joe Harris and Cy Williams, Jack Hedley's burros—Pete and Mike and Spot and the four others—came slowly past, nosing around for food.

"I guess they're wonderin' what's become uh Jack," said Dan. And even as he spoke he heard the sound of some one stumbling about the store, and Jack Hedley muttering to himself.

"What's the matter, Jack?" called Cy. "Floor's gittin' too hard fer yer bones?"

There was no answer; and a minute or two afterward Jack Hedley, a forlorn-looking object, blear-eyed and covered with dust, stood in the doorway with a half loaf of bread in his hand.

"I gotter feed them burros," he said.

"Yuh better go back to sleep, Jack," said Dan. "Them burros ain't hungry."

"Mike, come here," said Jack Hedley. "Come here; I want yuh."

The burros watched him thoughtfully.

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"They know me," said Jack. "Each uh them li'l burros! Call 'em by name an' they cuc-come to me." He swayed unsteadily on his feet; and then, snapping his fingers, he walked toward them.

"Spot!" he said. "Come along, Spot! An' Pete, yuh doggone li'l cuss, come an' git some bub-bread when I tell yuh."

The burros looked at their bareheaded owner as if he were some one whom they had never seen before and of whom they did not altogether approve. When he was within a few feet of Pete, still holding out his bread and talking, Pete turned its back on him and strolled off, flapping its big ears. And one by one the other six did the same.

Jack glanced at the three men seated by the door, laughing at him.

"I dunno' what's come over them bub-burros," he said thickly.

"I do, though," said Dan. "I know perfectly well, an' if yuh seen yerself now, you'd know, too. You're drunk, an' them burros is ashamed uh yuh. Understand? They're ashamed uh yuh; an' what's more, I ain't surprised."

Jack Hedley let the bread fall out of his hand.

"How's that?" he said, choking.

"Them burros don't wanter have nothin' to do with yuh no more," said Dan with a grin. And then for the first time he saw Jack Hedley angry.

"They don't, don't they!" he said, quivering with rage. "Them burros don't want to have nothin' to do with me, don't they? All right, then, I don't want to have nothin' to do with them. They can git to —— out of it fer all I care. —— them!"

He stooped and picked up a stone.

"Git outer here!" he shouted. "Yuh hear me! Turn me down, would yuh? All right then; I'm through with the lot uh yuh." He flung the stone and struck Spot on the side of the head. "That 'ull l'arn yuh," he said.

Spot swung around and made off, and Jack Hedley threw another stone which went wide and another which bumped up off the ground and hit Mike on the leg.

"Git right outer my sight!" he shouted, while the onlookers yelled with laughter. "Yuh can go whar yuh like an' do what yuh like, but don't yuh come near me or I'll shoot yuh!"

And still throwing stones and cursing, Jack Hedley drove his burros across the railroad-track. Then he turned and, without paying the least attention to the men outside the store, staggered off in the direction of his shack, with his shoulders humped and his hands stuck in his belt.

"Now what do yuh know about that, hey?" said Joe Harris.

"I never seen any one like Jack Hedley fer makin' a —— show uh himself over his burros," said Cy. "As good as a circus any day."

"I wish I hadn't said that about them burros bein' ashamed uh him," said Dan.

"Aw, shucks!" said Joe. "He'll fergit all about it; yuh see if he don't."

And Dan judged that he was right. Of course he would forget. Besides, what did it matter anyway?

THAT night Dan Watson, Joe Harris, Fat Sam Durnford, Ben Grier, Cy Williams and Dutch Harry sat on the store veranda and watched Number Nine's headlight coming up from the far end of the lake. It was a scorching night, with no breeze to temper the heat, and the full moon was just up over the rim of the hills. No one had spoken for some minutes; and at length, when Number Nine was within half a mile of the station, Joe Harris got up from the steps.

"Let's go across to the depot an' wait."

"All right," said Dan, stretching his arms upward wearily. "Gee, but it's hot!"

Number Nine's whistle began to screech angrily.

"What's that for?" said Cy Williams. And just then they saw in the glare of the headlight Jack Hedley's burros crossing the track between the train and the three tanks.

Even the best of burros is likely to do foolish things at times. These seemed to be frightened. They turned and trotted along the track toward the station, with the whistle screeching behind them. When they did try to scatter it was too late.

"Oh, the devil!" said Dan. "Look!"

He heard the brakes grinding and saw the sparks, but it was no use. Like some irresistible monster bent on destruction, Number Nine swept on.

When they reached the spot they found that three of the burros had been killed—Mike and Pete and Maggie.

Cy Williams stooped over the fourth and gave a little cry.

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"It's Spot! Poor little Spot; an' her hind legs is all broken!"

Dan hurried to his side.

"Here! Any uh yuh boys gotten a gun on yuh?"

Cy Williams thrust a revolver into his hand.

"Go on, Dan," he muttered hoarsely. "I can't. An' fer Heaven's sake make haste!"

Dan shivered and pulled the trigger. The engineer came back from his cab, wiping his greasy, pallid face with a piece of waste.

"Say, why can't yuh keep them doggone burros offen the track? Night after night it's the same, an' I told yuh what would happen if it went on. See! It ain't my fault. I don't give a —— fer yer old burros. If yuh can't keep 'em away from the track they'll get themselves killed, an'—an' I guess you'll blame the railroad. It's yer own fault. Them —— burros! Scarin' a man that ways!" And he hurried back to his engine, mumbling to himself.

"Good Heavens!" said Dan in a whisper. "An' what 'ull *he* do when he sees?"

Joe Harris clutched at his elbow.

"Dan!" he said, and stopped. Coming along by the side of the track was Jack Hedley.

"Dan," continued Joe. You know him best, an' yuh got to tell him."

Jack Hedley reached them just as Number Nine began to move. He was sober and walked steadily.

Dan went toward him.

"Jack," he said hoarsely. "Jack——"

"Hello, Dan! Thought I heard shootin'. Nothin' wrong, is thar?"

"Nothin' much," said one of the brakemen, swinging himself on to the steps of the day-coach. "Killed a donkey or two, that's all. So long, boys!"

"What's that?" asked Jack quickly. "What did he say?"

Dan took hold of his arm. "Jack, there's been an accident."

"Not Spot!" said Jack, flinging him off. "Fer God's sake, Dan, don't tell me they've killed Spot!"

"Yes, Jack, they've killed Spot; an' Pete's gone, too, an' Mike, an' Dewey."

And then he saw Spot lying where Dan had shot the animal, and he dropped to his knees, crying like a woman, and he took the poor little burro's head in his lap.

"Spot!" he said. "Oh, Spot, Spot!"

And that was about all that he did say, or as much as they heard.

"It's tough on him somehow," said Cy Williams. "—— tough!"

"An' just a burro," whispered Dan; "just an ord'nery, little gray burro, same as yuh see anywheres." And as he looked, the whole thing seemed unreal and impossible —the man with the dead burro's head in his lap, the other three burros lying by the track, the miners with their hands in their pockets, standing around without speaking; the tanks, the railway-track and the desert stretching away to the mountains, clear and distinct in the desert moon. After a time Jack Hedley raised his head.

"Spot's dead, an' it's my fault. I drove her away from me, when I was drunk. An' —God fergive me!—I killed her!"

"Jack," said Cy Williams, touching him gently on the shoulder. "It's time you was goin' home. It's late."

Jack stood up, very slowly and wearily.

"Yes," he said; "it's late, ain't it? An' Spot's dead."

And then Joe Harris and Dan took him off to his cabin. At the door he turned to them and spoke in a mild, dull tone that they did not recognize.

"Good night, an' thank yuh fer what you've done. I won't ask yuh in, boys."

"Can't we do nothin' fer yuh, Jack?" asked Joe. But the door closed gently and they came away.

"Lord!" said Dan. "I wish I hadn't been such a doggone fool an' said that about them burros today. I'm always doin' what I ought-n't to."

"It's hot," said Joe. "Ain't it?"

EARLY in the morning Dan got out of bed and dressed. Jack Hedley was seated on the steps of his cabin, staring out over the desert with a curious blind expression.

"How are yuh this morning, Jack?" Dan asked him. But he did not stir nor change his position nor remove his gaze from the glaring sand with the mirage already showing at the far end. So Dan left him alone with his troubles and returned to his own shack.

That same morning the section-boss came into town with his gang.

"What's them burros doin' on the side uh the track thar?" he growled. "Whose are they?"

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"Jack Hedley's," said Dan. "An' as Number Nine killed 'em, you'd better git yer gang uh Greasers to work an' bury 'em."

The section-boss, a big man with a fiery temper, grunted.

"Them —— burros is more bother than they're worth. I'm about sick an' tired uh diggin' graves fer burros what's been run over. Why the —— can't you fellers keep 'em away from the tracks?"

"Why don't you guys fence in yer —— old railroad?" snapped Fat Sam.

"S'pose you'd think that's funny!" said the section-boss.

"It don't matter a cuss if it is," said Cy Williams. "But lemme tell yuh the railroad's got to give compensation fer them burros or thar'll be somethin' doin'."

IV

FOR two days Jack Hedley did not stir one foot from his own place, but on the third evening about six o'clock he came down to the store and bought some coffee and bacon. And they saw then that he had changed; he was an old man, worn out and stooping, fit for nothing else but to spend the rest of his days sitting in the sun, half asleep, the same as any other old man. On his way back to the cabin the three burros that had escaped the killing followed after him. He halted and watched them; then he turned and made off, half running.

"See that?" said Cy Williams with a laugh. "What do yuh know about that, hey?"

"Poor old Jack!" said Dan. "Guess he'll be glad to leave now, anyways. He's had all he wants uh Paradise Crossin' an' everything connected with it." And Dan was right.

MR. MORRISON, as pink and plump and as good-natured as ever, arrived that evening from Los Angeles on Number Nine, and with him came the friend of whom he had spoken.

"And where's Jack Hedley?" he asked, after he had been talking for a few minutes in the store. "I'd like to see him if he's around anywhere, because we're ready to start off first thing in the morning, if he is."

And at that the inhabitants of Paradise Crossing, who were waiting until such time as the mail was sorted, looked at Dan.

"Git on, Dan," said Joe Harris. "You'd better tell."

And so Dan Watson told the story of Jack Hedley's burros. Mr. Morrison stared at Dan with his eyes wide open.

"Oh! His donkeys were killed, were they? And he's worrying, is he? Well, that's all right. I'll see that he doesn't lose by it." And he smiled as if he were pleased at having the opportunity of doing some one a good turn, while Dan wondered a trifle wearily if it were the least use trying to explain. The price of four burros was nothing to him, of course. Dan understood that perfectly. He shrugged his shoulders and turned away.

"Dan," said Mr. Bronson, the postmaster, "look at here." He held out a letter. "This is fer Jack. From the railroad people, ain't it? Wonder what's in it."

"I wonder," said Dan. "About them burros? Wonder if they're offering him anything. He's liable to be sore if they are."

From where he sat, near the partition which served to divide the post-office from the rest of the store, Dan could hear Mr. Morrison talking in a penetrating voice.

"Yes, certainly—certainly; and in the morning we'll be up early to see what plans our friend Mr. Hedley has. I'm sorry about his burros—more than sorry; but I guess we'll get around that all right. Hard on him of course. But such things do happen, don't they? Good night, all." And Mr. Morrison drifted out into the night.

"He can't help it, can he?" Dan laughed.

SOON after breakfast Dan met Jack Hedley making his way to the store. "Mornin', Jack," he began, and then hesitated. Jack gave him a little nod but did not speak.

At the store Mr. Bronson came out on the veranda and handed him the letter from the railroad. For a minute or so he stood twisting the envelope around and around in his fingers, almost as if afraid to open it.

And then, Mr. Morrison appeared, dressed by this time in a brand-new suit of khaki. With him was his friend, a small, dark, quiet man who smiled muchbut spoke seldom. Also there came Cy Williams and Joe Harris and Fat Sam, eager for any crumbs of excitement that might fall their way.

"How do you do, Mr. Hedley," said Mr. Morrison. "Glad to see you again." He shook Jack's unresisting hand, and then

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beckoned to his friend. "This is Mr. Davis," he said.

Jack Hedley looked at him as one who was not over-interested in what he heard.

"Mr. Davis," continued Mr. Morrison impressively, "is a mining engineer, and is coming with us to see the property and give an individual opinion. We—er—thought that we'd start off as soon as we could." Jack Hedley still stared at him without speaking, and Mr. Morrison reddened and cleared his throat. "That is, if—if it's quite convenient to you, Mr. Hedley. I forget now how long you said it would take us to get to the place."

His enthusiasm seemed to be giving way to a vague alarm.

"Get what?" said Jack Hedley abruptly.

"Why," said Mr. Morrison, "to your claim. What we were speaking about a few days ago."

The old prospector nodded.

"The claim," he said. "Whar I found that rock, hey?" He glanced at the faces of the men around him, and his eyes lit on Dan Watson. "But that wasn't the rock I threw at Spot, was it?"

Then he unfolded the letter and read; and a worried frown came into his forehead, and his cheeks paled under the tan, and he shivered as if cold. At last he turned his back on the group and began to laugh and laugh, until Cy Williams grabbed him by the arms.

"Stop it!" he said. "Jack, fer the love uh Heaven, stop it!"

"What is it, Jack?" said Dan under his breath. "What's wrong?"

Jack Hedley gave a deep sob away down in his throat.

"Ten dollars!" he said. "As if any money in the world would make up fer what they done to me!"

"What is it?" repeated Dan. "Tell us, Jack, what is it?"

"Ten dollars!" he said. "Ten dollars compensation fer Spot! Ten dollars a head fer Spot an' Mike——" He tore the letter into small pieces. "I'd kill them fer that, if they was here. They offers me money, do they? They think, do they, that I'd touch one cent uh their money? They kill Spot, an' they want me to take ten dollars!"

He broke off; and Mr. Morrison, his pink face beaming with the look of one who does a kind action, stepped forward.

"It's a shame," he said. "A —— shame! They were worth five times that, each of them. But it doesn't make any difference. Very soon you'll have so much money you won't know how to spend it all. Think what you'll get out of the mine, and cheer up. Why——" He paused and smiled; and not even at that moment did he seem to see the blank looks on the faces of the miners. "Why, you'll be able to buy all the burros in California and not feel it!"

Jack Hedley put his hand to his head and backed off as if some one had hit him.

"Buy all the burros in California!" he said. "I dare say I could. Did I tell you that Spot's dead? I couldn't buy Spot again, could I?" No one said a word. "Thar ain't nothin' more, is thar? I guess I'll be goin' now, anyways," and he walked off to his own cabin.

Mr. Morrison turned to the others with a little gesture of despair.

"Did I say anything I shouldn't have?" he asked nervously. "I didn't mean to, you know."

And Dan Watson had not the heart to tell him what he had done. Moreover, when once a stranger has been accepted as a friend, as had Mr. Morrison of New York, it is not manners to point out his failings.

Mr. Davis lit his pipe.

"I guess he thought a terr'ble lot uh his burros," he said.

"But," said Mr. Morrison, "he'll be able to buy plenty more. That's what I told him." And he spoke with the air of a small child trying his best to make the grown-ups understand his meaning. "Well," he said finally, "Jack Hedley won't be making a start this morning at least."

BUT half an hour later Dan Watson, seated on a soap-box outside the store, pondering on matters too deep for his comprehension, looked up and saw Jack Hedley coming swiftly down the slope toward the depot, driving before him one of his burros.

"What the ——'s up now?" muttered Dan. And he felt that nothing that could happen would surprise him. But in this he was wrong.

"Jack," he said, "what's the matter?" But Jack Hedley passed the store without so much as turning his head. Dan jumped to his feet and ran after him.

"Where are yuh goin', Jack?" he asked.

"Me!" said the old prospector, and Dan saw that his eyes were blazing and that his

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face was all drawn and gray. "Me! Why, Danny, boy, I'm just a-goin' a little ways over thar," and he pointed west toward the mountains. "I'm in a hurry, Dan. Good-by."

"But," said Dan, "what's takin' yuh out there?" And then the voice of Mr. Morrison broke in eagerly.

"You're not making a start for your claims, are you, Mr. Hedley?" he asked. And by this time everybody in Paradise Crossing was out in the sun standing around listening and asking questions. "We've not gotten our things together—canteens or provisions," continued Mr. Morrison in some agitation. "And you'll need more burros than one, surely."

Jack Hedley nodded gravely.

"Yes, that's just it. Burros. I've lost some uh my burros, an' I'm goin' to look fer 'em. I drove 'em away. Good-by. Giddup, Jenny, ol' gal! Giddup!"

And he moved off once more as if no more explanation were needed. Dan Watson caught hold of his arm.

"Don't be a —— fool!" he said. "Yuh can't do no good. You'll never find 'em."

"What's that, Dan?" said the other. "Never find 'em! Uh course I'll find 'em."

"Oh, fer Heaven's sake, Jack! Don't be crazy." Dan still held on to his arm. "Well, listen here! Let me go with yuh. You can't go runnin' away like this. Come on, Jack! You an' me is pretty good pals; let me come with yuh. I'll help yuh find them. Two's better than one when you're out trackin'. Be sensible!"

"No," said Jack. "I'm a-goin' by myself. It's a long, long ways to whar them burros uh mine are, an' I ain't a-goin' to take no one with me. I know whar they are, the very place." He was crossing the railroad-track by this time, with the others trailing after him, no one saying a word save Dan.

"Jack," he said, "wait till after dinner. There's no hurry just now. Come on, Jack!"

All at once it seemed that Jack Hedley's patience was at an end. He stopped suddenly and turned, and the next instant Dan was gazing down the barrel of a rusty, old-fashioned .38.

"Now," said Jack, "yuh quit that, Dan! Savvy! You an' me is pals, an' I like yuh, Danny, I do so; but by ——! if yuh don't stay whar yuh are, I'll put a bullet through yuh."

There is no argument that will prevail against a .38, even if it is rusty and old-fashioned. Jack Hedley started once more.

"An'," said he over his shoulder, "the first man that comes after me—I don't care who it is—I'll shoot."

They stood by the track—Cy Williams, and Charlie Smith, the station-agent, Bronson and Mrs. Bronson, Mr. Morrison, his hands deep in his pockets and a look of dejection on his face, Mr. Davis, smiling slightly, Joe Harris, Dutch Harry, Fat Sam, Ben Grier and Dan. None of them spoke as they watched Jack Hedley and his burro tramping in the blinding sunlight in the direction of the naked mountains.

"Didn't he remember that they was dead?" said Dan, after a time. "What did he mean by sayin' he was goin' to look fer 'em? What's he after, hey? An' we can't do nothin'."

"Maybe he'll be in by tomorrow," said Mr. Morrison gloomily. But Dan, still watching the two figures, the man and the burro, tramping steadily across the lake, shook his head.

"No," he said. "No, Mr. Morrison. I don't like to think so, but I guess we've seen the last uh Jack Hedley."

"What's that?" said Mr. Morrison. "You mean to tell me that—that that man we're looking at now will never return to Paradise Crossing?"

"Yes," said Dan slowly, "that's what I mean. You'd better look at him now, for I guess you'll never see him again once he gets out o' sight in them hills."

Then, shrugging his shoulders, he turned and walked slowly toward his small shack at the back of Paradise Crossng.

AND the next morning early, Cy Williams and Dan set out on the trail of the man who had gone to seek his dead burros in the desert. At noon, when they were seated in the shade of a rock, they saw Jenny, Jack Hedley's little brown burro, coming toward them down a slope between two steep hillsides. Cy jumped up and caught it. There was no pack on its back, but around its neck was a piece of cord to which was tied a small tobacco-sack.

"What's this?" said Cy. "What's this fer?"

"Open it," said Dan. "Mebbe there's a letter."

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In the sack was a wad of greenbacks, rolled up tightly.

Cy counted them rapidly.

"A hundred an' seventy," he said, "an' no message nor nothin'. What the ——'s the reason uh this, Danny?"

"I guess it means that it's no use lookin' any more fer Jack Hedley," said Dan. "That's the balance uh the two hundred that Mr. Morrison give him fer a first payment, an' he's sendin' it back to him. Got a piece uh paper, Cy? I'll just write that we met the burro, an' that the money's fer Mr. Morrison." He scribbled a few lines and then stowed the notes back where they had found them and tied the sack to the cord. "Now, Jenny, yuh git home. Go on; git!" And they left the burro to make its way back to Paradise Crossing as best it could.

That afternoon they lost the trail on the hard ground. For the whole of another day they searched among the rocks and cañons for any trace of the missing man. Later on, when they were seated around a fire of greasewood, Cy Williams leaned forward.

"Dan," he said, "maybe he's given us the slip an' is back in Paradise Crossin'."

"Maybe he is," said Dan, lifting the coffee-pot off the fire. "Maybe he is."

"Yuh think so?" said Cy.

"Not by a —— sight I don't," said Dan. "He's gone. An' tomorrer we'll hike fer home."

So Cy Williams and Dan returned to Paradise Crossing and learned that the little brown burro had arrived with the money, but with no sign of Jack Hedley.

"Well," said Dan, "that ends it. Poor old Jack! I didn't think we'd find him, anyways." He stood for a moment with his hands in his pockets, staring at the light in the store. Then he gave a little sigh. "Let's go an' see about supper, Cy."

Mr. Bronson, the storekeeper, touched him on the shoulder.

"Dan," he said, "there's something else. Something for you—from old Jack."

"How's that?" said Dan, and his heart began to thump unsteadily.

"Yesterday me an' Joe Harris, we went up to Jack's cabin, an' we found this." He held out a half sheet of paper. "This is fer you, Dan."

Dan took it into his hands and, stepping inside the store, read Jack Hedley's last will and testament.

This is to say that if anything should happen to me, Jack Hedley, of Paradise Crossing, San Bernardino County, State of California, U. S. A., that I wants everything I owns to go to Danny Watson, all my belongings, my seven burros, my tools and gear, my claims in the Avawatz and the claim that I done find, to be known as the Burro Mine. This is situated from Paradise Crossing southeast——

And here the writing stopped. Dan threw back his head and laughed until the tears came.

"What is it, Dan?" said Cy Williams.

"What do yuh know about that, hey? An' written before he went down to the store that mornin' to git drunk! He's left me the Burro Mine to do what I like with. All that Jack Hedley would have made out of it belongs to me, but — but he ain't told me where it is! I own the richest prospect in California, an'—an' I'll sell it fer six bits!"

THAT night Mr. Morrison departed from Paradise Crossing.

As he stood on the step of the Pullman just before Number Ten pulled out, he bent down and spoke to Dan in a whisper.

"And you don't think it's any use trying to look for that mine then, do you, Dan?"

Dan, still covered with the dust and grime of the desert, unshaven and dirty and haggard, glanced up at the smooth, plump face with the eye-glasses and the double chin.

"Mister," he said, "have yuh ever tried to find that needle they're always talkin' about? That's nothin' to what it would be to try an' find that prospect uh Jack Hedley's, the Lost Burro Mine. It's another Peg-Leg. It's southeast uh here, an' I reckon from one thing an' another somewheres between the Sheephole Mountains an' the Colorado. An' that's the —— of a country to go paradin' around in."

"What made him do it?" asked Mr. Morrison plaintively. "You don't mean to say a man would do what he did just for the sake of a burro?"

Dan nodded his head gravely.

"Yes, Mr. Morrison; that's what he did. Just fer the sake of a little old burro."

"I don't understand you desert-folk," said Mr. Morrison, after a short silence "I don't indeed."

"I don't think we do ourselves," said Dan with a little laugh.

And then Number Nine began to move; and that was the last seen of Mr. Morrison at Paradise Crossing.

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Safe or Out?

By Hugh S. Fullerton

BACK in 1893 I was working on a newspaper in Cincinnati and reporting baseball games when not busy "covering" the river, Squires' Courts, and the Federal Building, and incidentally doing police. In the same city was a famous sporting-editor who had been long in the business and whose judgment, or at least whose decisions, were final in sporting-affairs, especially in baseball.

One day late in August the veteran editor handed me a letter which he had received. The communication was from the captains of the baseball teams representing the towns of Wellsville and Jefferson, which are situated in the Ohio River hills within one hundres miles of Cincinnati, and only a few miles apart. It stated that the teams had agreed upon the veteran editor as the umpire of a game of baseball that they were to play for the "Amateur Championship of Southern Ohio and a side bet of Five Hundred Dollars."

The editor was fat and short-winded, and it was out of the question for him to umpire. He explained that as the teams had agreed to permit him to choose the umpire in case he could not officiate personally, he would, if I so desired, name me. I could go up Thursday morning, umpire the game and return to the city by ten o'clock that same night; and the clubs agreed to pay me twenty-five dollars and expenses.

My salary was eighteen dollars a week, partly in "due bills," and the prospect of twenty-five dollars extra for a few hours in the open air was tempting. I had umpired a few games of ball, knew the rules, and had all the confidence of youth in my own ability to get along. So I arranged to trade days off with another reporter so as to get away on the Thursday of the game, and notified the veteran editor that I accepted the job.

"Get your twenty-five dollars and expenses before the game starts," he advised me; and added, "And may the Lord have mercy upon your soul."

The game was to be played in Wellsville and to reach that place I was instructed to get off the train at a station called Pope, where a man was to meet me with a conveyance to take me to Wellsville. I reached Pope about ten o'clock in the morning. After some time wasted in making inquiries, I located my guide in the saloon, and recalled having seen him when the train came in. He was a tall, raw-boned young man, and when I introduced myself he stood off at some distance and stared at me first in surprise, then in evident disgust.

"So you're the empire?" he asked, his tone expressing doubt. "I seen you git off the train, but I was lookin' fer a growed man. They orta sent a growed man. This ain't no boy's job."

His attitude and tone disturbed and alarmed me, but I managed to tell him that I could handle the game without any help from him or any one else, and that I knew the rules and would enforce them or there wouldn't be any game. We climbed into his buggy for the six-mile ride through the beautiful hill-country to the scene of the contest. On the way my driver cheered me by relating incidents of the games played in the past between the ball clubs of the rival towns, with extra-vivid touches concerning what happened to the umpires.

As far as I could gather, the teams played seven games each year, three in each town, and the deciding one in the town chosen by tossing a coin. This year each had won three games. It seemed customary for the teams to win all games played at home, and to lose all played on the rival grounds. Just how they decided who won was not clear, as each of the six games had ended in a riot and four of them in the beating up and chasing of the umpire. That is why they had decided upon an outsider as the arbiter.

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After hearing his stories, that twenty-five dollars did not seem so easily earned as it had when I left Cincinnati. However, I consoled myself with the thought that perhaps the driver might be attempting to have fun scaring me to test my nerve; so I pretended an indifference that was far from real, and remarked that, while I used to be quite a sprinter at school, my running days were over.

Wellsville is a town of about twelve hundred inhabitants, but when we drove into the place shortly before noon the streets were crowded as if for a county fair or a circus. Farmers for miles around had driven in, and they said that already the playing field was surrounded by wagons and carriages. The town of Jefferson had closed for the day and moved to Wellsville to see that their team got "fair play."

My youthful appearance caused a murmur of surprised protest and doubt when I jumped from the buggy at the hotel. I heard one man remark that I wouldn't last one inning, and that any player on either team could lick me. Evidently they expected me to be a prize-fighter or a desperado capable of whipping both teams. I pretended to ignore the remarks, and, carrying my mask and protector into the hotel lobby, registered; while a hundred or more men crowded into the little lobby, scrutinized me and made remarks about my appearance, complaining loudly because Harry, the veteran editor, had not come himself.

I was going to the wash-room when a giant of a man, who I afterward learned was the village blacksmith of Jefferson, stepped in front of me and blocked the way.

"I'm the Captain of the Jefferson team," he announced loudly and belligerently.

I extended my hand and remarked that I was glad to meet him. He did not offer to shake hands, but with both hands in his pockets he added, "An' I want a square deal out of you."

His manner angered me, and I remarked—

"Well, that's what I'm here for; and don't think you can bluff me."

I brushed past him with a shove, and a lot of the bystanders laughed. The Jefferson Captain grew red in the neck and remarked something about what he would do to me that afternoon. I washed and went in to dinner.

The dining-room was crowded, but I had a table to myself, every one seeming to shun me. The players of the Jefferson team, big husky farm-hands most of them, were eating a dinner that was enough to founder a harvest-hand in preparation for playing ball. During the meal the players talked in loud tones, telling each other what they intended to do to that "Cincinnati dude" if he robbed them. When I came out of the dining-room I was confronted by three men. One, wearing long whiskers, said he was the father of the pitcher for the Wellsville team. I extended my hand, which he ignored, and said—

"We heerd that the Captain of the Jefferson team has you fixed."

"I didn't speak ten words to him," I replied angrily. "Besides, I'm up here to umpire this game, not to rob any one."

"A feller kin say a lot in ten words," said the father of the pitcher meaningly. "We seen you offer to shake hands with him."

"Yes, and his manners are about as good as yours," I retorted.

"Anyhow, young feller," remarked the whiskered one, "if you don't want to have trouble in this here town you give our boys a square deal."

"It looks to me," I replied angrily, "that you don't want a square deal. You want the best of it."

"We're entitled to the best of it on our home grounds," remarked the youngest man in the trio, a banker in the town. "They got it last time up in Jefferson, and we want it."

"Well, nobody is going to get the best of this if I can help it," I replied, and walked away.

My foolishness in answering them angrily was demonstrated. In five minutes the rumor had gone all over town that I had admitted that I was "ag'in' our boys," and didn't intend to give them the best of it. The Jefferson contingent began to warm up toward me, and when I moved I found that I was being escorted by a body-guard of half a dozen Jefferson adherents.

MY FRIEND DOYLE'S ADVICE

THE situation was becoming embarrassing, to say the least. I started for a stroll to escape the crowd, but a trail of men and boys followed me, watching my every move. On the main street a

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pretty girl, about eighteen years old, spat at me and made a face, saying I was a robber paid to steal the game from "our boys." Every group of Wellsville adherents glared at me threateningly. If they felt that way before the game started, I had a mental picture of what would happen on the ball-field.

I was strolling along, wondering whether it would not be the wiser course to mount a horse and flee to the railroad, when a man accosted me. He was about five feet four inches tall, weighed about one hundred and fifteen pounds, wore heavy-lensed glasses and coughed as if he had tuberculosis. He said his name was Doyle and that he was editor of the paper. We shook hands and went over to his little office and, after a time, I complained to him of the lack of fairness among the people. Doyle laughed until he had a coughing-fit at the idea of looking for fairness among them.

"You've got to bluff them," he said. "I'll tell you how."

He outlined a plan against which I protested until he convinced me it was the only way. We walked out to the Fair Grounds together. There were perhaps four thousand persons there. A huge, kite-shaped line of wagons and carriages extended entirely around the field.

Inside these, from the board backstop to first and third bases and beyond, stood lines of men from five to ten deep. They had crowded up to within ten feet of the plate and almost on to the first and third base-lines. I was greeted with derisive shouts and threats. One young man walked up and shook his fist in my face, the crowd applauding him.

Acting upon Doyle's advice, I called the Marshals of the two towns to the home plate and, talking so that as many as possible might hear, ordered them to drive the crowd back. I walked into the thick of the crowd, leading the Marshals, and with a sharp stake marked lines back of which spectators were to stand.

The Marshals drove them back, while they hooted, howled and occasionally resisted. There were half a dozen fierce fights between ahherents of the rival teams going on at once. I knew that to show fear meant the finish, and kept running through the crowd, saying:

"Here, some of you fellows help. We want to get the game started."

The bluff worked. In a few minutes I had a hundred volunteers driving the crowd back. Most of the Jefferson crowd had massed along the third-base side, most of the Wellsville crowd on the first-base side. I stationed the Marshal of Jefferson on the Wellsville side and ordered him in loud tones to hold the crowd where it was, and if necessary to shoot down the line if they tried to break over it. Then I took the Marshal of Wellsville to the Jefferson side and gave him the same instructions.

The Marshals nodded grimly. When Doyle had suggested the plan I had laughed. Now I realized that they took baseball earnestly. I heard one man say, "Gee, that Cincinnati dude means business." And another remarked, "I bet he's got a gun hisself." The Mayor of Wellsville heard the remark about the gun and, coming to the plate, ran his hands over my pockets to make certain I was unarmed.

It was almost time for the game to start and I made a grand-stand play. Taking off my coat and vest, I walked over and tossed them to a decent-looking young fellow, asking him to hold them until the game was over. I also gave him my watch-chain and stick-pin, keeping the watch with the remark that I needed it to forfeit the game if either team delayed play. I heard them murmur the remark that I intended to stay. Several yelled at me that they would express my clothes to me.

I called the Captains to the plate. Both teams crowded around, and I pretended to be angry and drove them all away.

"Let's have a ball-game, not a riot," I said to the Captains. "Each of you keep your players away. If you have a kick, make it yourselves."

"Where's your rule-book?" demanded the Jefferson Captain.

"I don't need it. I know them backwards, and I'm going to enforce them," I announced. "If you don't know the rules, I'll tell 'em to you."

The Wellsville catcher played back against the backstop and the game started. The batter swung at the first two pitched balls, which were three feet over his head. Then the catcher came up behind the bat. I slipped on my mask and crouched back of the catcher to watch the ball.

The crowd commenced to cheer. It was some time before I discovered that they were amazed at my courage. No one but

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the catcher ever had dared to stand back of the bat that way. The pitcher made two wild pitches, one of which struck my leg; and the crowd howled with glee. The next ball the batter missed.

By some miracle the catcher stopped it and threw it to first. I beat the runner to first base and was waiting to make the decision when the ball arrived; and I could see that they were impressed. The next batter reached first base on an error and, tossing off my mask, I ran down back of the pitcher to be in position to call balls and strikes and to judge base-plays.

The Captains ran in and asked me what I was doing, saying the rules said I must be behind the plate. I pretended to be laughing at them, and the crowd took upmy laugh and jeered them back to their positions. The next batter struck out and the catcher muffed again and threw to first base. The runner there had not started for second. The baseman dropped the ball, scrambled after it, and threw to second. I called the runner out because he was forced.

The next two minutes was riot. Neither team nor the spectators knew what had happened. One Captain claimed a double play, the other declared both runners were safe. Above the tumult I heard Doyle's squeaky voice yelling:

"He was right. He was right."

I drew a diagram of the play in the dirt, and the Captains, half convinced, allowed the game to go on. During the interruption there was a cutting-affray in the crowd, and the Wellsville Marshal went off duty while he arrested the knife-user and locked him in the band-stand until the game was over. The game was getting exciting.

Jefferson failed to score in the second. My lot seemed easier. No batter would wait long enough to let me call balls or strikes. In Wellsville's half of the third a batter hit the ball on the first bound to the Jefferson pitcher, who walked across toward first and tossed the ball underhand to the first baseman. I called the runner out, as the ball was at first twenty feet ahead of him. There was another riot.

The Wellsville Captain protested wildly and shook his fist under my nose. I could not understand his argument until he ran along the crowd on the base-line, calling for the "perfesser." The principal of the school responded, took a rule-book out of his pocket and read me the rule while the Wellsville crowd, held back by the waving revolver of the Jefferson Marshal, roared and screamed threats. The "perfesser" read that the ball must be thrown to first base ahead of the runner.

"Well," I replied, "it was there a block ahead of him."

"But it wasn't thrown; it was pitched," he protested. It was ten minutes before order was restored and the game resumed.

For four innings the game consisted of a series of fist-fights in the crowd and strike-outs. Luckily for me there was not a close decision, although every decision was a signal for an outburst of threats from the faction decided against. Each time I could hear Doyle's voice screeching:

"He was right. He was right."

And my heart warmed to him.

In the last of the fifth inning Wellsville scored two runs because the Jefferson center-fielder muffed an easy fly, and a moment later the shortstop threw the ball into a wagon. Under the ground-rules we had agreed upon, the runners were entitled only to two bases, yet when I sent the runners back it almost started a riot, and I rejoiced when a wild pitch let them both score.

The ball had gone into a wagon loaded with Wellsville partizans, and five or six men were fighting to keep it there while the Jefferson fans stormed the wagon trying to get the ball. A free-for-all fight was going on when I threw another ball into play.

With the score 2 to 0 against them the Jefferson crowd became sullen. They yelled threats to "get me" and charged that I was bought. The fact that there had not been a decision that was even doubtful made no difference.

The ninth inning started with the score 5 to 1 in favor of Wellsville. Every run had been scored on wild throws or muffed flies, and I had called only two strikes—chiefly because the batters struck at everything in reach. The Wellsville crowd was in a good humor, while the Jefferson crowd was sullen and angry. I planned to walk over to the Wellsville crowd after the game and to keep with it, as being safer there.

"KILL HIM!"

THEN my troubles started in earnest. The Captain of the Jefferson team had an inspiration and ordered his men to wait instead of hitting. The Wellsville pitcher

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had not thrown a ball within a foot of the plate for three innings. When the Jefferson batters stood still and refused to swing, his wildness became noticeable.

The first batter drew a base on balls, three of the pitched balls going to the backstop on the line. The next one drew a base, and the Wellsville crowd quit exulting, began to get uneasy, and shouted that I was a robber trying to take the game away from them. When the third man drew a base the crowd surged forward angrily as if to attack me.

I heard the murmur of anger and turned just in time to see a revolver fired three times, the bullets kicking up little dust-clouds in right field, while the Wellsville right-fielder was going toward center and the Wellsville crowd scrambling back in panic. The Marshal of Jefferson was doing his duty. The Wellsville crowd was yelling:

"Lynch him!" "Kill him!" "Shoot him!" Meaning both the Marshal and me.

I turned to the Wellsville pitcher and said:

"For Heaven's sake keep pitching. If you don't there'll be a dozen murders here. Put 'em over the plate. Make 'em hit."

The pitcher obeyed; and the batter, who was watching the semi-riot, did not see the ball whizz over the center of the plate. When I called it a strike the Jefferson crowd turned upon me, and the Wellsville Marshal, eager to do some shooting, waved his gun threateningly. The next ball went straight over the plate and I called another strike.

The Jefferson crowd raved and threatened while the Wellsville crowd jeered at them and became friendly to me. Then the pitcher made a wild pitch that let in two runs, and finally hit the batter. With two on bases, two runs needed to tie, and no one out I became alarmed.

The next play saved my life. The pitcher accidentally threw the ball over the plate and the batter hit straight back at him. He threw up his hands and the ball stuck in them. There was an easy triple play in prospect, as the runners were bewildered, not knowing which way to go. The pitcher motioned first toward third, then toward first, and finally tossed the ball to first and completed the double play, but permitted the runner to get back to third.

There was a mild riot, which subsided when Doyle, exponent of fair play, stood in a wagon and screeched that I was right. My trials seemed about ended, but the next batter popped an easy fly to the shortstop, who muffed it and let the runner score from third. The next batter got a base on balls and, although two of them were wild pitches, the crowd raved at me and threatened my life. Two or three empty whisky-bottles went *whee-whee-whee* through the air past my head.

Then a batter rolled an easy bounder to the shortstop. He could have walked over to second, touched it, and ended the game, but he threw low to first. The runner on third had not started home and the bases were filled. At that point the two Marshals stopped play while they ran out with drawn revolvers to break up a fight near third base and dragged two men to the lock-up in the band-stand.

You may imagine I was nervous about the next play. The worst I feared was that I would be compelled to give a batter a base on balls and force home the tying run. The batter refused to strike at two wide balls, and each time I called "Ball!" there was a scream of rage. I never knew whether I would have had the nerve to call two more. It was not necessary.

The Captain of the Jefferson team was on first base. He was standing with one foot on the bag when some one threw a stone and hit him in the back. With a yell of rage he turned and rushed at the crowd, and commenced to pummel any one he could reach with his fists. The pitcher tossed the ball to the first baseman, who rushed into the *mêlée* and touched the runner. I thought the worst had befallen me. If I allowed the runner to come back and hold first because of interference by outsiders the Wellsville crowd would kill me. If not, the Jefferson partizans would. I looked for a safe line of retreat. There was none. Four thousand persons seemed rushing at me.

But they passed me and bumped me about unnoticed. They were trying to reach the scene of the free-for-all fight back of first base. Suddenly it dawned upon me that the crowd had decided the play for itself. The Wellsville partizans who weren't fighting were cheering over the "victory," and the Jefferson crowd was complaining it wasn't fair. But no one blamed me.

"AHEM!"

THAT evening Doyle drove me across to the railroad station after a hundred or more men had assured me I was the

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best umpire they ever had and asked me to come again. We were nearly to the station when Doyle coughed and remarked:

"Say, could an umpire have let that runner go back to first?"

As diplomatically as possible I explained that the rules were not specific, but that generally the umpires did not allow outside interference. He looked thoughtful a moment and remarked——

"I was thinking about that when I threw that stone."

The Guns of the Seventy-Third

By

Donald Francis McGrew

THE guns of the 73d were not the heavy-barreled cannon employed by the artillery, for the 73d was a Volunteer Cavalry regiment, and, as such, entitled to carry nothing larger than the small-arm service rifle. The *guns of a regiment*, however, are not inanimate pieces of iron and wood, but the knowledge and the craft and the backbone which come from proper training.

Therefore, because they lacked this, the 73d went to war with guns of a sort, but of the other sort, none at all; so, when they ran into the business end of a bad proposition, they behaved themselves very badly.

One must not, however, jump too hastily to conclusions. There are many things pro and con to be said about the matter.

"When engaged in the business of going to war," said the Aide, "it would seem that every executive man concerned would necessarily bend every effort to search out the most business-like methods with which to carry on that war."

"Yes," said the Major-General. "But in a country where the isolated huckster of McCool, Indiana, has as much right to his opinion as the best-posted expert on military affairs, they ofttimes force the god of war to wear some awful robes. Yes, sir! They expect him to stalk like Hamlet, and make him dance to the pipes of a satyr."

"Quite so, sir," nodded the Aide. "Though there is something in their argument that they will not need to colonize for the next hundred years. They claim, too, that Big Money creates all the wars."

"Yes," returned his superior. "But they forget that Big Money will keep on creating wars until wars cease to be a means of getting money. It is cheaper in taxes—and blood—to pay for the upkeep of a prepared army than the antics of an army unprepared."

Thus spoke the Aide and the Major General in commenting on the action. The men of the 40th Regular Infantry said harsher things; but they had suffered insult at the hands of the 73d, and so were unduly prejudiced.

TO BEGIN with, the 73d's home city called them "a spanking fine regiment." And they were—a fine-*looking* regiment. With shoulders squared and horses prancing and golden braid shining across the blue of eight men lined abreast, they had no superiors among the gallant paraders of city thoroughfares.

In addition to this, their ranks were made up of young men from the well-salaried walks of life. As a consequence their political influence was not to be despised; and because they had had no small hand in electing their Congressman, they looked to be sent immediately to the front when war was declared with Spain.

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But at the outset their fire seemed destined to heat an engine without wheels. Their Congressman chanced to be at loggerheads with the powers that be. Nor were there sufficient funds with which to mount them. So there befell a shortage of horses, and a wild regiment of unhorsed fire-eaters cursed the Government because it would not let them rush to Tampa and die of tainted beef.

The short, sharp war with Spain passed and the regiment gave up all hope. Then rumors of war came from the Philippines; and suddenly their Congressman swapped cigars with his erstwhile enemies, and fourteen hundred men in uniforms were bundled on to troop-trains and rushed to 'Frisco.

The bands played, and the crowds cheered, and the fresh-cheeked boys among them leaned back against the seats, listening to the swinging haversacks, and telling themselves that war was fine. And not one man among them had ever ducked to the whistle of lead, save five somnambulators who had, in all innocence, crept into a farmer's hen-coop while at maneuvers.

But this did not matter, contended the 73d. Half-grasping the theory of the regular army, they argued that if the ability to wheel and interwheel symmetrically made for steadiness under fire, they stood an excellent chance alongside the burlesque volunteer "outfits" they found at 'Frisco.

The 73d were certainly able to come down to the "order arms" without knocking their little toes off. They proved this conclusively on the sand-lots of Presidio, to the open delight of the officer-instructors; and in due time the 73d acquired a pronounced swagger and began to consider themselves the Great Squee-Gees and the High Moguls. They were in this state when the 40th Regulars, returning from Cuba, found the 73d in wooden barracks, while they, the 40th, were forced to camp alongside in tents.

The Regulars' Colonel went at once to protest to the Volunteer General commanding; and while he was gone the 40th expressed themselves. They informed the 73d that no "tin-horn swatties in band-box uniforms should be allowed precedence over their betters."

The 73d retorted acidulously; whereupon there arrived on the scene the "makings of a fine shindy," only squelched by the guard and an order to exchange their places of abode. Under ordinary circumstances this chasm might have been bridged over, as the average Volunteer is usually glad to listen to Regulars who will teach him the craft of the profession. But the 73d had bathed and cleaned their finger-nails since boyhood; and they looked askance at men who came into the service for the express purpose of filling their bellies.

Quite naturally, then, the 73d swallowed the name of the 40th as so much vinegar. They knew that some of them hailed from slums; that some of their non-commissioned officers had backed away from the snort of an engine on the day of enlistment; and that others had bathed only in Summer. However, seventy-five per cent. of the 40th were *soldiers*, and knew it; and they quoted fragments from that song which runs—

"It isn't what you used to be, it's what you are today."

It transpired, then, that the men of the 73d left camp in squads; and so did the men of the 40th; and more than one man from both outfits required identification-cards when they reported for reveille.

The climax came when the two regiments were ordered to the Islands. In the mix-ups that occurred in those days, a shortage of guns forced the 45th to take the Krags of the 40th when ordered to Luzon. Likewise had the 73d turned over its single-shot Springfields to the 51st. Hence a shipment of rifles was rushed to them—a consignment of single-shot Springfields, and another of magazine Krags. The Colonel of the 40th had in the meantime been promoted; in the shortage of officers a Captain temporarily commanded them; therefore the 73d marched down to the docks with the modern Krags, while the 40th followed after, shouldering the single-shot Springfields!

Stiff-chinned and quiet, but raging at heart, the Regulars marched on to the dock with the rhythmic, resounding tread of sandaled Roman legions.

Then some wit in the crowd, who was on to the joke, called out—

"Hi! Look at the stew bums with the guns of the 73d!"

That call rang in the 40th's ears; and once aboard their own transport they cursed viciously from between locked teeth.

SOME moons after the departure from 'Frisco we find the Major-General, with a mountain battery, the 40th regulars, and the 73d, sizing up a

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position filled with hostile Moros. In the interim many things had befallen the 73d. To wit:

Landing at Manila they fully expected to fill the Caloocan trenches. Instead, the wise old Commander-in-Chief sent the 40th to the front, and the 73d to the north coast of Mindanao, a place six hundred miles south of Manila, where no one expected any fighting of sorts to occur.

"We'll break them in by letting them keep that bunch of Pulajanes guerrillas away from the coast-line," said the Commander-in-Chief to the Major-General. "May send you down there to use a little direct English to those Moros later on."

Thus the 73d, late leaders of cotillions in the armory, went down to Mindanao to study bush warfare. At that time the Mohammedan Moros were keeping to their sullen, inland mountains, only ordering the Americans not to enter the interior, so the 73d's initiation was conducted by one Rodiquez, a Visayan guerrilla.

The 73d studied the game closely and found that it consisted of almost nightly sorties against false alarms, and of precious sleep lost wallowing through choking *cogon* grass after a man you could never find. Between times they became acquainted with the Filipino banana, the effects of dysentery, the delights of 'dobie itch, the tropical mosquito, Filipino *bino*, native women, the art of handling a number two shovel, and the strains of the "Dead-March."

Later still, when Rodiquez was chased off toward Monticao by the 53d, the 73d had the opportunity of studying Moros who came down to trade with the Tagalogs at Iligan. They found them a long, lean lot of brutes with muddy, yellow skins, black, knotted hair, betel-blackened teeth, sensual lips, and flaring nostrils—a race as ugly as their handiwork, which, in the morning sun, is a sight to shock a surgeon.

"Veritable devils, sir, veritable devils!" exclaimed the Colonel of the 73d, reporting to the Major-General. "Sneak up like cats in the night. Four and five-foot bolos. Two-handed swings. Then . . . I tell you, General, I may be censured for dealing summarily with those five suspects I caught—but it was necessary, *necessary!*"

"Obviously," grunted the Major-General. "How are the men? Fairly fit?"

"Well—er—as well as could be expected, sir."

The Colonel went on to explain some of the things that can befall a regiment of men commanded by a man who has "soldiered" in a law-office in private life.

"As it is," he hurried on, "they are extremely anxious to go, sir."

"Hope that may carry them through," muttered the Major-General, when they were marching up the trail.

"A few Regulars among their officers would help," said the Aide. "Er—would you deem it good judgment, General, to turn over those Krags to the 40th?"

"We-e-ll—no. Not if these plans the guide turned over are O. K. And, I say, Captain—slip over there tonight when we camp. They haven't learned to make themselves half-way comfortable yet. If they don't get some decent sleep, we'll have to nurse them along at a snail's pace."

This was true. There are four mountain-ranges in the world worth writing about. The mountains of Mindanao constitute one. On the coast you are in the smiling tropics; two miles inland you draw close to your fellows for comfort.

The 73d, struggling over a mammoth stretch of great cañons, chasms, peaks, and pot-holes, shuddered under the loathsome vampires, and gleaned some acidulous philosophy concerning that part of war wherein stomachs become bellies and the necessities of life are discarded.

"Not that they won't be fit enough when they get their wind," apologized their Colonel when they arrived near Pantui's *cota*.* "They have never marched such a distance before."

"They haven't marched this, either!" snapped the Major-General, sitting down on a log to take stock of the situation. "They *crawled* it!"

NOW, in going after the Moro in these days, you will sometimes have to climb to the top of an extinct volcano; again he will be found on a high plateau, well protected by neck-deep rifle-pits and shooting through bamboo-tubes; another time, if he can trap you in a valley, he will fall on your neck to the tune of five to one and waltz you around the place till you yelp a wish to return home, and retire behind the ice-cream counter, and stay.

In this case, the Moros were entrenched against a hill-side at the south end of a great

*Moro entrenchments.

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V-shaped valley. The trenches were in the apex. The bottom of the valley sloped gently upward toward the apex from north to south.

On either side ran wooded ridges, the west ridge curving at the northern end of the V and sweeping eastward so that one entered the great enclosure in a comparatively narrow passage from the east. Back of the trenches were forests which screened the *barrio* from sight, and into which the Moros could slip in case of retreat.

"Fine!" commented the Major-General.

"Rather simple for us, isn't it?" said the over-impulsive Aide. "Have the battery shell from this ridge as a preliminary to the infantry attack and we'll dislodge them in twenty minutes."

"Young man," returned the veteran not unkindly, "I don't want to dislodge them. Not unless it is necessary. I want to pulverize them!

"Now," he went on, "I understand the Dons were fool enough to march too far in, in column of fours, without protecting their flanks. The west one especially. The east is not heavily wooded enough to hide many men. They have cut the grass. Figuring on good footing. Expect us to march in and engage them hand to hand as the Spanish did, no doubt. But—" and they hung on his words— "we won't."

Then he explained his plan. The 40th were to pass into the woods of the west ridge and proceed south, keeping out of sight, and form battle-front to the east in the edge of the trees when within good rifle range of the *cota*. The battery would go into "action front" on the ridge near the General, thus commanding the entire valley. Two companies of the 40th would remain with the battery as reserve.

The 73d, meanwhile, in an attempt to entice the Moros into the open, would take position below the General's ridge and make a demonstration by means of an advance, though not firing a shot, lest the Moros should learn the range of the Krags. They were not to advance over three hundred yards, and if the Moros started out they would halt until the brown men had advanced some four hundred yards from their *cota*, when the 73d would *remain where they were*, extend into line of skirmishers, and, at the signal from above, commence firing. Simultaneously the battery would open up over their heads, and the 40th, well in the clear to the west, would roll up any possible flankers, rush to the edge of the woods, and cut in with a cross-fire.

"A nice neat way to decoy the Moros and keep the 73d from getting their feet into the hot part of the soup," thought the Aide.

A half hour later the 73d came through the pass, and, marching in battalion column of fours, swung toward the Moro *cota*. Here and there a number one or four leaned sidewise to peer ahead, while an occasional number two or three raised on his tiptoes to look forward over his comrade's head.

Too far off to distinguish individuals, they could see the sun gleam on a myriad bolos and spears, and here and there the glint of a gold belt across a sub-dato's breast as the horde came from the *cota*.

"About a million of 'em!" muttered one man in the first set of fours.

"Shut up!" snapped his company commander—who owned a cigar-store at home. "Right forward—no—I mean—keep on marching there,——it!"

A nervous titter ran along the company; and upon the ridge the General was saying—

"A little wobbly, a little wobbly, but—ah!"

He bit hard on the stem of his pipe. Below him the 73d had reached its approximate distance and halted, and the Moros, after pausing a moment in evident consultation, were coming swiftly forward. Eleven hundred yards lay between them—the Moros were increasing their stride, and the battery men itching at the gun-breeches——

"Give 'em the High Sign!" snapped the Major-General.

At the signal the battery opened the ball with a roar, while the three battalions of the 73d swung like so many wobbly gates from columns of fours into an extended line of skirmishers. As fast as the men took position on the line, they fell prone and commenced firing.

"We're off!" grunted the Major-General. "Only——"

He lowered his glasses to address an orderly.

"Tell the Captain to get that range!" he commanded. A second later—"Where in —— is the 40th?"

"There they go now, sir. Hear 'em?"

The General nodded and sighed with relief, for in the next breath the woods on the west ridge echoed to a roll of musketry-fire, and from the ridge, dropping down the incline, came a bevy of Moros. Shortly

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after, a few of the 40th's men began getting into position in the edge of the trees.

OF WHAT followed, many things may be said. Expecting neither cannon, flank-movement, nor small-arms of such diabolical range, the Moros were now at the mercy of three fires. Therefore they should have been beautifully smashed with the loss of a man or two on the American side, had not three things, all obviously out of sympathy with the scheme, happened within a short space of time.

The first happening concerned the battery. They had been allowed no preliminary or "sighting" shots. Of the four shells at the first fire, one tore up the ground one hundred yards ahead of the Moros; another carried to their trenches; two burst one hundred feet above their heads. Within the next minute, had the Moros commenced to "mill" confusedly, they might have presented a solid and comparatively stationary target for the battery; but—and in the meantime the majority of the 40th were taking tea with the brown flankers and not able to give the main body their attention—the Moros charged.

That was the second happening—which may be laid to hashish; and the last brings us again to the 73d.

The sound of troop fire at target-practise is exciting enough; the sound of a regiment firing in actual engagement is something that may act on unaccustomed participants with the effect of a potent drug. Thrown thus from a nervous quiet into sudden action, the 73d did many and wondrous things.

In five seconds their mouth-roofs were dry and their eye-balls hot; in seven their minds leaped riotously like chaff before a gale; in ten their jolting Krags were slashing with tons and tons of lead a territory that extended from fifty yards ahead to the island of Twai-Twai; in twelve the regiment had shed its veneer of training, and was no longer a regiment. Composed of intelligent men, all capable of thinking some for themselves, but not understanding when not to think for themselves, the regiment was now become a yowling, howling line of maniacs whose elbows worked madly, whose yells alone would have drowned any command, and whose seats of judgment were drunk with noise.

"A little excited," said the General.

"Excited?" murmured the Aide. "Oh, Billy-Old-Baltimore-Jones!"

Then across the plain the 73d saw the shells burst above the Moros, and—amazing fact!—saw the entire brown horde sweep forward.

THUS in the turn of a hair did the brunt of the battle fall on the 73d. Naturally the 40th could not cut in after the Moros passed a certain point, lest they do divers things to the Volunteers; naturally the battery could not take any chances on its trajectory after the Moros had come closer. But there were still a thousand yards between the Moros and the 73d; it would take at the best two and one-half minutes to cover it.

The regiment had a glorious chance to sit tight and get in at least forty shots to a man, totaling some forty thousand rounds, which ought to make any enemy pause to ponder the situation. But the 73d was suddenly seized with a thousand impulses all against that style of procedure. That is, some one private was seized with it—and jumped up. The spark set off a magazine.

In their condition they might have run had some one gone the other way. As it was, the private yelled, "Come on, boys!"—and with a horrible yell the 73d leaped to its feet and charged.

"Well, what the——!" gasped the 40th as they ceased firing; and, "My ——!" wailed the Aide. "They've gummed the whole deck!"

The battery commander said worse. He danced up and down, begging—

"General, let me shell the whole —— mess!"

"I'd like to let you," groaned the Major-General. "Move Company B over on the west ridge there—double time!"

The 73d and the brown horde met—and swirled in a hideous din. Smoke from the old blunderbusses curled above it, and the sun danced off innumerable bolos rising and falling like waves on a choppy sea. The semblance of formation ceased; tens of men merged into indistinguishable groups, fell apart, went down, arose; in a trice the blue-shirted Volunteers were scattered and engulfed in a seething brownish stew.

"I guess you're right, General!" grunted the Colonel of the 40th, looking at the frantic wig-wag on the north cliff. "We'll have to go to work."

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"To work is right!" thougnt the men, as the brown mess began to vomit tens of bleeding Volunteers. "Oh, look at the muckers run!"

And nine completely disgusted companies moved down the west ridge with fixed bayonets, leaving the tenth to waltz with any possible Moro reserve that broke into the dance without a ticket.

"It's all —— unnecessary!" grumbled one who still belonged to the twenty-five per cent.—a young graduate from a military school who had "taken on" in hopes of a commission.

"Shut up and mind your step!" admonished his sergeant behind him—a man who when he enlisted ten years before had spent four hours searching the post for "a keg of pickled eel's feet."

So they went forward at the quick-step, nine companies in double rank. They had no heart in the work, for the consensus of opinion damned the 73d to a deserved cutting-up. Your Regular's plan of life embodies doing his "little bit," getting moderately soused when he can, and praying for a war and a chance of promotion; but he has absolutely no wish to be killed, nor to do one single thing that he deems unessential.

Yet this Regular, who came from Podunk or no one knows where, has had soaked into him—or blarneyed, or explained, or cursed, or cuffed as the case may be—that thing upon which the destinies of empire hang. It is the knowledge of when not to think of one's self.

Therefore the 40th went forward—with the guns of the 73d. And the 40th *kept* going forward, herding the Moros as they went. The scattered 73d were breaking for the rear in platoons, their wild enthusiasm split on the edge of a bolo; and the 40th dared not fire a shot for fear of ventilating systems dedicated to the future glory of Uncle Sam. It savored of policemen's work, though a trifle more arduous.

They entertained the brown men with "The Over and Down," "The Sweet End of the Butt," "The Haymaker's Lift on the Bayonet," and other ditties played in the operas called "Changing the Map;" and it was most amazing to the Mohammedans to see how quickly a man's place was filled when one of the impervious orchestra took sick. As a chopping-block, this new tribe proved a dismal failure; but as an orchestra to top off the concert with "Mr. Moro's March to Allah," they were the High Cockalorums, and the Huge McCues, and then some.

WATCHING their work, the Major-General felt a bursting sensation in his chest. And it is said of the Aide that he stood on his head and wiggled his heels.

Then the 40th began to swing, with the right company as a hinge. And what are you going to do with a concrete gate like that? If you were a true-blue Mohammedan, Allah might have prompted you to bring out a few hundred babies to throw on the bayonets; or if you were as good at fencing as you are at slashing, or your neighbor would show a little politeness and get off your corns, you might have a chance.

As it is, you will back up, or be disarmed by a wrist-breaking flip, and lifted into heaven on a bayonet without having had a chance to kill your allotted Christian. So you back up, and back up; and then——

With the 73d out of the line of fire, the 40th sighed and commenced blowing the Moros off the muzzles with "dummed" bullets that enter the key-hole of the front door going in and take the casing off the back door going out. Judiciously placed, they will take the medal on the breast of a front-rank man to the vest pocket of the seventh man back, which is a neat feat, and discommoding to the enemy.

Twenty-five per cent. of the 40th probably wasted enough ammunition to pay the taxes on a farm or two; but seventy-five per cent. remembered that you must look over the sights while aiming, that you must not flinch and close your eyes at the moment of pulling trigger, that you must not have your sights set at a thousand and expect to hit a man at fifty. In remembering which they earned their "thirteen per and plus," and some medals worth eighty-six cents and three mills.

Seeing how things were going, the Major-General started to help the sobbing officers of the 73d re-form. But some of the milling 73d had started shooting—which is bad judgment, when you excitedly fire your gun —off yonder. The Major-General fell with a bullet through the shoulder. Then the reserve double-timed down; and the Moros grew deucedly cold at the pit of the stomach and evinced a desire to locate in Davao, three hundred miles away. The 40th could

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not follow them very far, for after all the "Haymaker's Lift on the Bayonet" is a hard piece to play.

LYING back on his litter, the Major-General eyed the slack-cheeked, dead-eyed Colonel of the 73d.

"Did you—er—order that charge, Colonel?"

"I—well, I——" Suddenly the racked officer stiffened. "Yes, sir, I did!"

"You're a——liar," drawled the wounded man. "For that I'll—— Well, that's all. Please call the surgeon, Colonel."

When the surgeon came in, he said, "That bullet was a Moro slug—understand?"

The surgeon raised his eyebrows, but nodded.

"Then, surgeon, can I have some paper?"

It is good to humor a sick Major-General. The paper secured, the General went to work with his good right arm, and computed as follows:

To one regiment of Militia Cavalry, war strength 1,400 men and officers, organized about four years and eight months ago, and maintained during four years of peace at a strength of 800 men. Approximate cost:

4 YEARS, TIME OF PEACE

50 mounted drills per year. Horse rental, $1.50 per man per drill. 800 men, 1 year, $60,000. 4 years	$240,000.00
2 weeks' camping per year. Horse rental, $3.00 per day per horse. 800 men, $2,400 per day. 8 weeks	134,400.00
Target-practise. 150 rounds per man per year. 4 years, 600. Cost, at $32.00 per 1,000 shells	15,360.00
8 weeks' rations, $.23 per day per man	13,304.00
Horse-feed, 8 weeks	4,480.00
800 rifles at $13.00	10,400.00
800 cartridge-belts at $2.50	2,000.00
800 uniforms, allowance $11.00 per man per year	35,200.00
800 saddles at $15.60	12,480.00
800 sabers at $3.10	2,480.00
800 gun-boots at $2.50	2,000.00
800 horse-blankets at $3.50	2,800.00
800 canteens at $50	400.00
800 service-bridles at $4.50	3,600.00
800 spurs complete at $1.00	800.00
800 lariat and picket-pins at $.60	480.00
800 tin cups at $.25	200.00
800 saber-belts at $.50	400.00
800 saddle-bags at $7.50	6,000.00
800 surcingles at $.60	480.00
800 halters at $2.50	2,000.00
800 shelter-halfs at $2.50	2,000.00
800 tent-poles at $.24	192.00
800 tent-pins at $.05	40.00
800 mess-kits at $.60	480.00
800 watering-bridles at $1.50	1,200.00
800 pistols at $9.00	7,200.00
13 escort-wagons at $200.00	2,600.00
4 mules each wagon at $300.00	15,600.00
12 field-desks at $4.50	54.00
14 conical tents per company at $30.00	5,040.00
3 wall-tents per company at $18.00	648.00
7 wall-tents, headquarters, at $18.00	126.00
12 cooking-ranges at $30.00	360.00
12 sets company cooking-utensils	1,200.00
12 letters per year per man	816.00
	$526,820.00

8 MOS.' WAR SERVICE, 1,400 MEN

Peace expenditure brought forward	$526,820.00
600 extra rifles at $13.00	7,800.00
Transportation to 'Frisco at $50.00	70,000.00
Transportation Pacific	70,000.00
Target practise, 'Frisco, 200 rounds per man	8,960.00
Night fiascos, Mindanao, 200 rounds per man	8,960.00
Fight, 75 rounds per man	2,720.00
8 mos.' wages	184,800.00
8 mos.' rations, at $.23	77,280.00
Uniform allowance per man, $56.50	79,100.00
Overhead expense, inc. hospital	20,000.00
	$1,056,440.00

RESULTS TO DATE

156 men killed in one action.
12 men killed on post.
84 died: dysentery, cholera, tropical fever.
300, health probably ruined permanently.
26 men of 40th killed unnecessarily.
32 wounded of 40th unnecessarily.
2,000 Moros escaped.
Cost of catching later, probably $3,000,000.
$2,000,000 spent on maintenance and training of mountain-battery with no results from said battery to date.
Out of 1,400 Moros killed, probably only 100 accounted for by this $1,056,440.00 organization.
Probable cost of pensions for wounded, and litigation by widows, etc., for pensions over unnecessary casualties, etc.—

ONLY GOD KNOWS!

At this point the Major-General grew tired. When the solicitous Aide came in from looking over the 40th—sullen and steady 40th, digging a trench for the dead—the Major-General handed the paper to him and told him to tear it up. Later he turned over some thoughts in his mind concerning one man and a nation, and some widows and orphans, and sent in a report saying that the 73d had suffered heavily from an unexpected flank attack, but had deported themselves in a manner befitting the representatives of a great State.

The General was—usually—an unemotional man.

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"Go, Tell the Czar!"

An Adventure of Dick Anthony of Arran

By Talbot Mundy

DAY dawned on the Caspian. The reeds of Astrabad Bay ringed the blue mist and a million birds rose out of them noisily, to settle again in silence that was measured into spaces by the lapping of a ground-swell. In the distance a sounder of wild pig squealed and grunted.

On a tongue of land that stretched out through the marsh to make the only landing-place two men fought savagely, with tearing fingers—hot-hissing, face-to-face. Intefested kites wheeled lazily above them.

From out of the mist to seaward came the unexpected, deadened thump of oars, but the two fought on. A man spoke continually—encouragingly—in Persian; then he changed to English, and an order rang out of the mist—not loud, but with distinctness that arrests attention, and with that distinction that conveys authority. The voice was unmusical, and carried far; but the two men paid no attention to it, they were of Asia, locked tight in an Asiatic hate, obsessed, unrousable.

A sail developed out of the immeasurable haze. It swayed and grew nearer, silent, slack-draped, shadowy. Another splash was added to the noise of oars, as a specter jerked spasmodically and a sounding-lead struck water, to be drawn out with a suck.

"A quarter less 'an twa fathom, Mr. Dicky—an' lessenin'. Starboard a wee!"

The second voice sounded like a coast fog-warning. A rudder gurgled as an angle changed. But the two on shore lay locked in their hate-hold—deaf, dumb—oblivious except to blood-lust.

"A fathom—but a fathom noo, Mr. Dicky! Reeds ahead!"

A hull grew out of mist beneath the shadowy sail. "Easy all!" said the first voice, and the thump of unskilled rowing ceased.

"Lan', sir! I see lan'! Yonder there's a bit sticks oot an' might do verra weel f'r a landin'. Can ye no' see?"

The helm gurgled a quick answer, and the low hull swung.

"Weigh, bow!" said the first voice. "Weigh, all!"

The creaking of weary oars began again, and a heavy-beamed unpainted native craft crept shoreward, head-on, to the slow flap of an unfilled sail. The bow swept through reeds with a swish and rustle, touched bottom with a bump, and rested. But neither that nor the clatter of oars along the thwarts put a stop to the fight twenty yards away.

A giant leaped from the bows, as the Vikings leaped on England in the dawn of history, face-forward, ready for happenings. He caught the hellish rasp of breath, fought for between clenched fingers, and leaned forward with one hand to his ear.

"They'll be fechtin', Mr. Dicky, close at han'!"

"Make fast then, and wait for me!"

"Aye, aye!"

The giant dragged the anchor overboard, and plunged it into clay with one sweep of his tremendous arms. The action was instant, but he had not finished before another man stood beside him, who surely seemed lord of all he looked at; surely man,

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in every inch of every clean-drawn fiber of his being, tawny-headed, neatly knit; a man who sprang from the bow, and stood and looked as never Viking did—for the Vikings were slaves to superstition, and this man, Dick Anthony, was free. He had a strange old claymore hung to his side, that helped him seem to step out of a page of history.

He, too, caught the sound of strangling breath. He started instantly in its direction, and the big man followed him too closely for an enemy to slip between. Dick stopped, and stooped to look closer into a patch of trampled grass. Andry Macdougal crouched behind him like a well-trained hound in leash. Dick seized a human leg and tugged at it; but there was no response.

"Tweak it!" advised Andry in his ear.

"No. Grab the other man, and pull!"

Andry moved and chose another leg from out the tangle. He pulled as if he were helping get an anchor up, and the two men held as if they were pit-bull-terriers fighting for a purse. The new strain put on them would have burst steel shackles, and no flesh and blood could have withstood it; but the instant they were wrenched apart each turned on his rescuer; and—numb, dumb, breathless—they had spite enough remaining to be dangerous. Dick had to kneel on his man and squeeze the fight out of him.

Andry carried his half-throttled savage to the water's edge and ducked him until he was too weak to remonstrate; then he laid him on the grass.

"See yon!" he grinned, pointing.

DICK followed the direction of his finger, stooped where the grass had been trampled by the fighting, and picked up a little leather bag. He shook it, and it jingled; so he opened it. Then he slipped it in his pocket quickly, for the two men moved. A little breeze was blowing up, and the mist melted in front of it; all four could see other each plainly.

At the same instant, at sight of the same small bag in Dick's hands, the men who had fought to a stale-mate recovered breath, will, reason, or at least instinct. Instinctively Dick and Andry glanced, each to make sure that the other was alert. They glanced back, and there was nothing where the two had been; they had vanished like frightened animals.

"Did the bag have a deal o' siller in it?" wondered Andry.

"Gold!" said Dick.

"Gowd! Huh!" Andry looked like a graven image—huge, heavy, humorous; some Rodin, with a taste for the terrific and grotesque, might have carved him from granite and left him there to mark a boundary. "Did ye never see twa burdies fechtin' for a wum, an' a bigger burdie tak' it awa' fra baith o' 'em? Findin's keepin's, Mr. Dicky! Keep it in y'r pooch!"

Dick laughed, and the unmusical note was uncannily appropriate to a man who stepped thus out of Caspian mist, with a jeweled claymore swinging at his waist. Andry recognized the note, caught his eye, and followed its direction.

From the boat that had borne them out of unexpectedness the rowers and their chief—eight men in turbans—were pitching their belongings to the shore in hurried silence, and there was not detectable among the eight of them one single symptom of regret at leaving. Dick strode toward them with the half-humorous, quite deferential air of a man who knows his mind, but sees no need for speaking it—as yet.

"Do you happen to recognize this place, Usbeg Ali Khan?" he asked.

"Nay, sahib! But I recognize dry land, and know that Allah made it!"

"Would you care to sail farther, and try for a better landing?"

"God forbid, sahib!" The Afghan stepped ashore, and bowed his stateliest. "Thou art a wonder of a man, and thy handling of a ship gives confidence. No other man in all the world could have made my horsemen row! It was good, sahib! But Allah rested when the world was made, and made no more world; now, we too would rest, and do no more rowing."

"Didn't like it, eh?"

"We are horsemen, sahib! That ship" (he turned and spat; each of his seven followed suit) "has made my belly ache and my bowels yearn for home as never fight did yet, and I have fought many fights! If there be nothing worse ashore than hell and devils, lead on, Bahadur!"

"And the boat—how about it?"

Dick had made his mind up. But one could tell, too, that he was strong enough to dare let other men have their say first.

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"May devils rot the boat and Russians ride in it!" swore Usbeg Ali Khan.

"Russian gunboats are scouring the Caspian now for sight of it," said Dick.

Andry pricked his ears; Usbeg Ali Khan stroked his black beard, and his seven waited silently in line, as became the henchmen of a warrior. Dick looked at the neat-enough native craft that had helped give the slip to Russia by weathering a Caspian southeaster; and, seamanlike, his heart went out to it. He, who once had learned to know himself by dint of fighting the Atlantic, could set its true worth on a stout ship, and be reverent.

"We'll burn it," he said quietly, and Andry grinned.

"Wad we were burnin' Roosia!" said the big man; but the eyes of all eight Afghans opened wide.

"Iskander!" muttered Usbeg Ali Khan. "The sword, the man, and now the manner of the man! Sahib," he said, and he looked Dick square between the eyes, "we have a legend that the Great Iskander burned a fleet of ships, when disaster lay behind him and the unknown lay ahead. Thou art strangely like that same Iskander!"

Dick—niggard of words, as always—did not see fit to answer him; he was watching Andry, who had climbed aboard and was bringing off the solitary bag that held all the remaining worldly goods of both.

"He is Iskander!" vowed Usbeg Ali Khan, nodding to his seven with an air of absolute conviction. He had done more than a little, more than once, to help confuse those two legends—of an Alexander who had conquered all the world, and another Alexander, of Scotland, who had given a sword to an old-time Anthony. He had begun by deliberately lying, but now he much more than half believed the tale himself. "Dress by the right!" he ordered suddenly. "Eyes front!"

"Burn the boat, Andry!" ordered Dick.

A moment later, smoke came from the half-decked-over afterpart. Two minutes more, and a tongue of flame licked up. Then the red flames crackled skyward, and the frightened birds raced in thousands from the smoke, while ten men of two different nations stood by their few belongings and looked on. Seven stood in line, with one in front of them. They all looked grim, each in his own way; and they looked almost childlike, in another, more appealing way as they watched the link between them and their recent past go up in fire. They watched until a Caspian ripple lapped over sizzling bulwarks like the lip of Nemesis, and there was nothing left but embers, staining the smooth sea.

DICK turned then to see eight Afghans with their hilts thrust out toward him. At a word from Usbeg Ali Khan they drew. Eight blades shot upward, shimmering in the morning sun. Eight pairs of level, Asiatic eyes looked into Dick's.

And so, in the cool of a Trans-Caspian morning, the last of all the Anthonys took his first steel-tipped salute, and answered it. The claymore's jeweled hilt went to his own lips, and he knew then that he and these eight men stood pledged in the bond unbreakable—the soldier's. There is a time in every strong man's life when he knows in the marrow of him that he and Fate are running on the wind together in front of a gaining tide. Dick knew it that minute. From the day when they had met first, Usbeg Ali Khan had never doubted it.

It was Andry who broke the spell. "What's yon?" he asked, pointing. The last of the smoke had gone with the mist, and the salt-deposits were scintillating in the sun; a man had to look through half-closed eyes.

"A horse!" said Dick. "A horse grazing!"

"*Bismillah!*" swore eight Afghans with one breath, for theirs is a nation that is born on horseback, weaned in stables, and taught in its youth that a man's legs are to ride with; the main part of their luggage was the saddles they had piled up in a heap.

"Aye, a horse," said Andry with less than a twentieth of the enthusiasm. His six feet five—two hundred-weight and odd—went better, and felt better, on his own two legs.

Eight of the ten had been war-taught in the trick of looking quickly; Andry had learned in the Army and at sea; yet Dick was quickest. Centering from a horse that grazed with an empty saddle on his back, all eyes searched out the plain in widening rings. In a moment Dick was off, running head forward, with drawn sword, and the others—not yet knowing

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why they ran—were streaming after him, Andry last.

One of the Afghans stopped and shouted, "Hold, sahib!" laughing at the notion that a stray horse could be caught that way. The horse laid his ears back, kicked, and galloped away; but Dick held on his course. Then they all saw what Dick had seen at once, and yelled in chorus.

But no yells ever scared a pricked pig from his quarry. Gray, red-eyed, foaming at the mouth, squealing and grunting indignation, the great-great-grandfather of all the boars was squandering the minutes, trying to turn a man over and so gore his stomach. The boar bled where a lance had touched him, the man where the four-inch tushes had ripped through his clothing in a dozen places to the skin. But the man still lived, and still had wit and strength enough to shield his face.

The gray boar was too busy at his worry to heed warning shouts, and it was not until Dick Anthony—running as if there were thirty men behind him and a Rugby goal in front—had reached within ten yards that the brute looked up at him, blinked twice, and charged.

They met head-on, sinewy wrist and straight-held steel—leathery hide, tush-guarded. The boar was the heavier; Dick had the benefit of reach. The boar was the savager, and more determined, for now that the other man was safe for the moment Dick's desire to kill had waned. Dick had the better weapon at the first, point-distant impact; but the boar, lone hero of a hundred fights, had all the experience; the boar had fought for and won the secret that close quarters was his vantage-ground; Dick should have known that his sword-length was the smallest measure of his safety. But Dick, too, was a believer in close quarters. And Dick still thought of pigs as pigs; he had seen them driven to market by old women, and he remembered.

The point of the claymore pierced perhaps a half-inch through the thick hide-armor that a wild pig wears, and slid down the shoulder far enough to spur the brute's last absolute extreme of fighting dander. Dick leaped aside in time to feel the wind of a right-left-right tush worry-stroke that missed his thigh by the fraction of an inch. The pig charged on, far enough to free himself from the irritating sword, jinked suddenly, blinked with red, hell-angry eyes, and came on again at twenty-five-foot range.

Andry saved the day. The pig would have gone through Dick's guard as he had charged through a horse's legs many a time. The Afghans had stopped to watch, for Usbeg Ali bade them see how a man, who was verily a man, would slay a monster; it would never have entered his courteous, illogical Afghan head to interfere between his hero and the prey.

But Andry had a generous meed of mother-instinct underneath his muscle-hefty breast, and not any hunting-courtesy. The watching Afghans reeled as he burst between them like a charge of chain-shot; and, as the boar rose on his hind legs to reach up-and-sideways for Dick's stomach, Andry's huge arms wrapped the brute as a bear's arms crunch a sheep, and the two went to earth together in a wonder-whirl of grunts and squeals and Scots profanity. (Andry was a hard swearer when he was not saying prayers.)

The great, grim Scotsman put forth all his strength and gathered the boar in to him, hugging, crushing, reaching for the hind legs, as wrestlers reach for a toe-hold without loosening their grip. The gray boar screamed its agony, and Andry's great sinews cracked. There was an awful, quivering, shuddering minute while the gamest fighting-beast in Asia fought for room to use its weapons—and then Andry labored to his feet. The veins were knotted on his temples, and his ugly, freckled face was like a gargoyle; but his smile and the eye-gleam told of victory. He gave such a yell of exultation as England's troopers listened to in Killiecrankie Pass, and then with a terrific heave he swung the boar by the hind legs, whirled it twice, and laid it full length with a thud, belly upward, on the grass.

"Stick him, Mr. Dicky, sir!" he panted.

So the gray boar died, as its pampered European cousins are more apt to do, on its back, crying to the god of fighting-pigs to come and see its ignominy. The sword-blade went in like a streak of light and came out reeking crimson; and the Afghans, struggling between amazement and loathing of the unclean touch of pig, wondered whether they should envy Andry or despise him. They had stood to see a hunting; they had seen a killing, which is different.

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"IS THAT good fellow hurt?" said a voice.

They all turned together to face a one-eyed man in a battered sun-helmet and a muddied Vandyke beard. His clothes were nearly ripped from him; one long riding-boot was cut from knee to heel as if it had been paper, and he was bleeding here and there, though in no place badly. His cuts had been accidental; the boar had striven for the stomach, despising lesser opportunities.

"They'd pay you big money in the stock-yards," he said, smiling and holding out his hand.

"Money's not a' that's big!" growled Andry, keeping his right hand behind him.

The man's action had been a gentleman's, the proffered hand of gratitude from the rescued to the rescuer; there seemed no excuse for Andry's attitude. But Dick interpreted.

"Show me your right hand, Andry!" he demanded.

"It's a' recht," said Andry, holding out the left one.

"Show me the other!"

Very unwillingly, with a face like that of a small boy caught with stolen apples, Andry did as he was told and showed a fist that dripped crimson. Above it the forearm gushed dark blood from a severed artery.

" 'Tis no' seerious at a'," he apologized.

Dick tore the sleeve from his own shirt and twisted it into a tourniquet, using his sword as a lever to turn it until the flow ceased altogether.

"Water!" he said then, and at a sign from Usbeg Ali the seven Afghans raced to be first to bring it. They found brackish water in a hollow of the ground, and two of them busied themselves sluicing it over the wound from their water-gourds until Andry ground his teeth and cursed all Asia and all pigs for the sting of it. Dick watched the wound, opening it with his thumbs to satisfy himself that it was clean; then, still holding Andry's forearm, he found time to speak to the man behind him.

"Your horse?" he asked.

"Yes." The man was more interested in Andry's wound than in his own troubles. He was watching over Dick's shoulder.

"Camp near?"

"A mile away."

"Servants?"

"Two. Cook-bearer and groom."

"Any money in the camp?" asked Dick.

"Yes. Some. Why?"

On frontiers, where king's writs do not run, strangers today ask no more questions than they used to yesterday; it is not safe. The one-eyed man raised his eyebrows as he answered.

"How much money, contained in what?" asked Dick.

The man stared harder yet, and looked uncomfortable. Dick, with that strange following and even stranger sword, saddles in a heap but no horses, turbans and uniforms but no tents, might be almost anything except a law-abiding gentleman. True, he spoke with authority and was obeyed, but that was additional evidence against him.

"I keep my money in a leather bag with my initials on it."

"Gold, by any chance?" asked Dick, still intent on the sluicing out of Andry's wound.

"English gold," said the one-eyed man. He was satisfied by this time that Dick meant to rob him, and in consideration of the rescue he chose to surrender with good grace. So much was entirely evident.

"What are the initials on the bag?" asked Dick.

"R. L." The man was speculating again, wildly now, and Dick looked hard at Andry's wound to hide a smile. Then he reached in his pocket and pulled out the little leather bag.

"Count 'em!" he said, holding it out.

THE man chose not to count. He slipped the bag into his pocket, and his face expressed astonishment, apology, bewilderment in turn. Dick interpreted each instantly. That way he had of watching and using none except necessary words cost him no friends in the long run, although it unveiled him many enemies, for few men can keep silent and yet fewer understand a strong man's reticence. This one-eyed man was able now to sense a little of Dick's strength, but when he tried to apply reason to it he was all at sea at once.

"May I reward your men?" he asked. "Perhaps you'd see to the distribution for me?"

He held out the bag that Dick had given him, and for once in his life Dick did not understand. *He* had not lived in Persia, where every action, every promise, every

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favor has its price in cash, and he had not realized quite yet that this man classified him as the leader of a robber band. He actually blushed. Andry forgot the sharp pain in his arms and grinned—not that the Scots are unappreciative of money; no nation values money more, unless it be the Afghans. Yet all eight Afghans bared their teeth. The stranger, feeling very much a stranger, wilted.

"I beg pardon," he said. "I'm afraid I've made an ass of myself. D'you mind putting it down to the shaking I've had?"

It was plain that he still did not quite believe his senses.

"Won't you catch his horse?" said Dick, for most of the Afghans were clustering close to listen.

"My own servants ought to be somewhere near," said the one-eyed man uneasily. Then he touched his pocket, and stammered at the thought of the recovered gold. "I don't understand any of this," he said. "Perhaps you know where my servants are?"

"Blowed if I do!" laughed Dick, "but there's your horse for you."

Two of Usbeg Ali's men led the horse up at a walk, and held it while its owner climbed into the saddle clumsily; his hurts were stiffening.

"I'd like to do more than just say, 'Thank you'," he said, looking from Dick to Andry and then back again. "My name's Lancaster—Robert Lancaster."

"You might have mentioned that before," said Dick. "I'm Richard Anthony."

"Of Arran?"

"Yes."

A new world of understanding and a dozen mixed emotions swept across the man's face. He started to dismount, but thought better of it.

"If that's who you are, I can be of service," he said emphatically. "Will you come over to my tent? I've an emergency outfit there, and you can bandage your man properly. After that I'll be happy to give you some information."

It was Dick's turn to stare hard now, and the incisiveness of his gaze was disconcerting. "Information about what?" he asked.

"About the Okhrana."

"Never heard of it."

"Ever hear of the Princess Olga Karageorgovich?"

"Yes," said Dick, frowning.

"She's the paw of the Okhrana. Will you come?"

Dick nodded. "Ride on," he said, "and I'll follow you."

"I can offer you a stirrup, and your man a tail," said Robert Lancaster.

"Thanks, but there are ten of us, all told," said Dick.

"I have met sahibs," muttered Usbeg Ali Khan, "who would have accepted first my service, and then that stirrup and that tail. We could have followed with our baggage! Bahadur," he said aloud, "let my men wait here and guard the baggage. Thou and I and that giant of thine will walk beside the horse, and learn this information!"

"Very well," said Dick; "lead on, Mr. Lancaster, if that suits you."

So a strange procession started for two tents, about a mile away.

II

THERE is a great gulf fixed between the "man with a grievance" and the man who has been wronged and knows it. Dick Anthony was carrying just then no load of gratitude to Fate, yet the one-eyed man who rode and kept looking down at him could see no sign of melancholy or misanthropy. Robert Lancaster prided himself on his ability to read character, and some of what he read was so obvious that he could not but be right; for instance, Dick strode like a man in armor; fear was not in his nature. But mistakes are easiest to make and riskiest concerning what *is* in a man; what is not there does not matter.

They talked little as they went, for Dick's answers were monosyllabic. Conversation was not easy, crossing that hummocky coarse-grass country and jumping the bad places; but, aside from the need to watch the footing, Dick Anthony had been promised information, and there was therefore nothing in the world more certain than that he would be silent until he had listened to it. The man on the horse did not know that, but he tried to analyze the silence, and once or twice to break it up with deft questions. He failed signally.

Dick could seldom tolerate a hat, and he had not learned yet to dread the Eastern sun nor to wear the sun-helmet, bought

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in Baku, with any degree of comfort. So Lancaster looked down at a tawny head that shone golden where the sun-rays touched it, and from the saddle's vantage-point he had opportunity to study character, assuming, as he did, that it is stamped indelibly on men's exteriors for any one to read.

He judged Dick to be visionary as well as fearless, impatient of control, hot-tempered, and intolerant. The very way Dick swiped at the flies with his helmet was eloquent to Lancaster of recklessness that might be played upon.

From time to time, in their efforts to cross water with dry feet, Andry and Usbeg Ali Khan would jump into his half-horizon. He set down Andry then as a great good-natured hound of a man, who might not be bought on any terms, but who certainly could be fooled. Usbeg Ali Khan seemed to him an adventurer pure and simple, out for the money and the plunder—a man to be persuaded, bought, or blackmailed; he had seen too many wandering Afghans to doubt his own judgment now of one of them. So by the time they reached the two white tents that glistened only one degree less than the myriad salt-deposits, he had formed about as many false conclusions as one man well may within an hour.

He offered breakfast—offered to cook it himself; but Dick had come for surgical necessities and information. The emergency outfit proved excellent; within ten minutes Andry's arm was as comfortable as it could be, and some extra bandages had been transferred to Usbeg Ali's haversack. Next Dick attended to his host's hurts, which, except for the effects of a vicious shaking-up, were superficial.

Then they all took seats on chairs and boxes in the larger of the two tents, and Robert Lancaster at once thrust out his muddy little beard, as he found himself at a terrific disadvantage. Three pairs of calm, unfrightened eyes were leveled at him. He felt them read him to the marrow. And he only had one eye to answer back.

"I wish I knew where my servants are, and how you recovered my money," he said, breaking the silence nervously. "I missed the men before dawn, saw smoke and fire by the shore a little later, and rode off to see what it meant. Half suspected a religious ceremony—always running foul of superstition in this country. Took a spear with me, on the off-chance of meeting pig. Met pig. That brings us to the introduction. Who's going to talk first, you or I?"

"You are," said Dick; and Robert Lancaster, nearly closing his one eye, became aware that what Dick said was so. He did not change his opinion of Dick exactly, but he added to it the conviction that this was a man who should be humored.

"Well," he said, twisting mud out of his beard with nervous fingers and watching Dick's extraordinary eyes, "first I'll tell you who and what I am exactly."

There was a table in the tent; Dick had one elbow on it. Lancaster fished inside an inner pocket, which had escaped ripping by a miracle; he produced a card-case drew out a clean card, and laid it in front of Dick as if it were the ace of trumps. Dick picked up the card and recognized the name of a financial house that is nearly as well known as some nations are. Robert Lancaster's name was in a bottom corner.

"I am their representative in Persia," he said.

"A banker, eh?"

"I call myself a banker when I am in Teheran."

He waited to be questioned further; but Dick preferred to listen to him, and knew how and when to wait; he seemed interested, but made no comment; and the other two knew better than to interrupt. So Lancaster, whose business had schooled him too in the use of silences, found himself compelled against his will to take up the thread again where he had left it. He was suffering from the shaking he had undergone, but he pulled himself together gamely and continued.

"Banker is what I have called myself in Teheran for twenty years. Agent is what I am. That includes a host of things. It includes, for example, the cultivation, by means at my discretion, of intimate relations with certain of the telegraph people, and others. I know what is going on, what has happened, what will happen. My people base their decisions on what I report."

His one eye was watching keenly for signs of some effect on his audience. It gave him a very furtive look, as it roved from one to the other of them, and Usbeg Ali Khan saw fit to answer him.

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"I always knew bankers to be surreptitious men," said the Afghan calmly, translating an Asiatic thought literally into English.

Robert Lancaster tried to stare him down, but failed; so he made a fresh start and a new effort to impress.

"*I know all your recent history, Mr. Anthony!*"

HE PAUSED again, to let the words sink in. But Dick, who was aware of having played his hand consistently, exactly as a gentleman, showed no emotion. On the other hand, Andry and Usbeg Ali Khan were full of pride that they had fought behind Dick in his hour of peril; they were glad indeed if this man knew enough to be appreciative and so have a point in common with them. They looked what they felt, and vaguely Robert Lancaster divined their attitude.

"For instance," he said, "I know that you were offered the command of the ex-Shah's army, in a third attempt he wants to make on the throne of Persia. You refused. You broke through the ranks of a Cossack regiment that tried to arrest you, and put to sea in the teeth of a storm through which not even the gunboats dared follow you. I was at Astrabad when the account came over the wire, and but for that boar having knocked nearly all the wits out of me I should have recognized you from the description. Am I correct, as far as I've gone?"

"So far," said Dick.

"Then, believe me, Mr. Anthony, I am correct too when I say that your description has been telegraphed to every point around the Caspian, and every avenue for escape has been cut off. *You are certain of arrest should you try to move in any direction!*"

He pointed a finger at Dick, and looked along it with his one eye, as a man squints down a rifle-barrel. Dick did not blench or answer.

"Before we met, when in possession of those and other facts about you, but with a quite different impression of you in my mind, I decided I would like to be your friend, and to make you certain advantageous offers. It did not seem possible to intercept you, and I regretted it. I came here to hunt pig while waiting for answers to letters I have sent to Europe. The thought I had uppermost was one of keen regret that you should be caught in some one of the hundred traps that have been laid for you. Yet here you are!"

"*Kismet!*" said Usbeg Ali Khan. "It was the will of God! Who can read God's ways in advance?"

Lancaster paused to let the Afghan's suggestion sink home and because he needed to husband his shaken strength. He understood by this time that Dick would not talk unless or until he finished; but that left him the field clear, and he proposed to take full advantage of it. He hoped to reduce Dick to pliability, either from excitement, nervousness or anger, so he took his time, and chose his words deliberately.

"The Princess Olga Karageorgovich—I understood you to say you know who *she* is—has telegraphed to all points the offer of a reward of five thousand rubles for your capture alive."

Dick looked interested, but was not moved to comment.

"Money will accomplish practically anything in Persia, Mr. Anthony!"

Dick did not answer.

"Under all the circumstances, our meeting is the most fortunate thing that could have happened, and not to you only. I flatter myself that many, very many, will benefit by it later on. But for the present, Mr. Anthony, I am sure I am the only considerable man in Persia who dare be your friend!"

"Hoots!" exclaimed Andry. "Hark!" He sat bolt upright, and the wrinkles on his weather-beaten face assumed new patterns. "I ken twa fr'en's o' his recht weel, an' there are seven more not a mile awa'! I'm a verra conseederable mon masel'—so's him on ma recht here. We baith ha' proovit what we are! Heh! Ye'd find yon peg that was worryin' ye easier to treat wi' condescension than oor Mr. Dicky! Dinna be too cocky, mon! We're a verra close corporation!"

"Shut up!" commanded Dick, and Andry, having had his say, lapsed into triumphant silence.

"The point I'm driving at," said Lancaster, "is this. From all accounts, you are a man worth while. If you had seemed an easy man to frighten or make use of, you would have been no use to me. But a man who can break through Russia's hold as you did is *the very man I have been looking*

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for—is a man, Mr. Anthony, *who can set me to sending cablegrams in code!*"

HE SAT back and looked away, as if he expected Dick to arise and answer him; but Dick sat still; so after a minute he continued.

"Reasoning along the line that the Okhrana would not make such frantic efforts to capture a nonentity, I decided before ever I met you to befriend you if I could, as a matter of business policy; and I have met you now under circumstances that add gratitude to my other reasons. The business policy remains, but a very strong element of personal regard is added to the motive for the offer I will make."

He might have been addressing three Supreme Court Judges. All three looked interested, and Dick by no means least of them; but Lancaster felt like the pleader for a weak cause, instead of what he was actually—a man of influence, with influence to offer, at a price. Not one of the three was inattentive or indifferent. Yet no three men he had ever met had looked so noncommittal.

"I mentioned the Okhrana," he continued, since some one had to break the silence and Dick would not. His respect for Dick was growing as he found how difficult Dick was to disturb, and yet how carefully he listened. It was he, not Dick, who forgot his hurts and began to grow excited as he stared into Dick's strange, strong eyes and gave his thoughts rein.

"You said you have never heard of the Okhrana. It is the Secret Police of Russia—the vilest monster, the most heartless tyranny, the deadliest, most damnable organized conspiracy this side of hell! The Okhrana is the Devil, busy about building hell—and the hell is here, in Persia, Mr. Anthony!"

Dick sat a little straighter, but said nothing. Usbeg Ali Khan nodded as if he recognized the truth; and Andry scowled, for to his dogmatic mind it was little less than blasphemy to take the Devil's name in vain.

"I invite you to wage war on this Devil, Mr. Anthony—you, with whatever followers you have as yet!"

"Is the invitation your own?"

"No, sir; my firm's. It shall be confirmed."

"And on whose behalf am I asked to fight?"

"Persia's."

"Sounds like a dream!" said Dick, and the heavy breathing of the other two, who sat with lips parted and drank in the words, almost confirmed him.

"It is a nightmare!" Lancaster was worked up now and in his stride. He held the table in a grip that nearly broke it, and Usbeg Ali Khan played second to him, gripping his saber-hilt with both hands; the name of war and the life of Usbeg Ali Khan were one. "Russia is not all to blame, Mr. Anthony. The Okhrana no more represents Russia than the Camorra represents Italy. In some respects they are similar, but the Camorra is a children's game compared to the Russian System—a pure, peaceful, decent thing compared to it! Once the Okhrana was a detective force, under control and useful. It grew like a vile disease, until it controls instead! Its tentacles reach everywhere. It has corrupted the nobility, the Army, Navy, Administration, Courts, trade, everything that it can reach! It owns the police, the press, the Church, the jails; it has its secret grip on foreign countries, and it molds, devises, blackmails, murders, buys, to one sole end—the propagation of itself! Russia and all neighboring countries are the board; the Czar is a pawn in the game! The king-piece, and the game itself, is the Okhrana!"

"So, I suppose," said Dick with a dry smile, "that your firm is the Cromwell and you are the Colonel Pride who will purge Russia? Is that it?"

Innocent of business knowledge and of modern politics, as nearly all young British gentleman are bound to be, Dick had none the less heard of "High Finance;" and the name of this man's firm was a synonym, even among schoolboys, for shrewd scheming.

"We will be thoroughly content to purge these three northern provinces of Persia, Mr. Anthony. It is you who are offered the part of Colonel Pride. I am no more than a go-between."

"Explain," said Dick.

Robert Lancaster—having not yet quite discarded all his false conclusions—saw fit to pave the way a little better before broaching details; he thought Dick Anthony might possibly imagine yet that there was

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more than one course to choose from, and he thought that he knew better.

"First consider your position, Mr. Anthony," he cautioned, holding out that forefinger again. "You dare not go home, even supposing that you could escape. There is a warrant out for you on account of the part you played in Egypt. You are a British officer. You would be arrested—court-martialed—disgraced—and probably imprisoned! Ha-ha! You see, my information is complete about you—my telegraphic tentacles reach far and wide!"

"Here goes the first lie in your teeth!" said Usbeg Ali Khan, arising and rattling his saber. "I fling it—I, who reported the whole of that affair in Alexandria to the authorities! There is no warrant for him, and there will be none! I told how he fought, and then fled from men who would have killed him because he knew too much, yet would not be one of them! I proved my identity, and then my record. I swore, then, on my honor as a soldier and a good Mohammedan, that I—who had listened to treason and looked on—was guiltier than he, who fought at the first mention of it! They answered that my word was good. It is good now, and by the Beard of God's Prophet I swear I will ride anywhither with him, and bear him witness in any court in any land. And I will fight beside him with this saber, wherever and against whom he sees fit to lead. My word is given. I am Usbeg Ali Khan!"

He sat down again, his white teeth showing in a fierce, thin line between his black beard and moustache, and his very whiskers bristling with fight.

"I wish you had mentioned that before," said Dick. "I've been all this time imagining the British and Egyptian Governments were both after me."

"Sahib," said the Afghan proudly, "oblige me and reconsider! First, as a soldier it fits scantly with mine honor to come bragging of the service I have done. Second, I have not had opportunity till now. You rejected my advances until the minute before leaving Russia; and on that devil-shaken ship you steered through hurricanes I was too busy keeping my insides within me to make conversation. Have I not spoken, now that there is need?"

"Thanks," said Dick.

"*Salaam, sahib!*"

"Ye're a mon, although ye're black!" said Andry seriously. If Afghans as a race detest one thing, it is to be accused of being black; but these two were beginning to understand each other. Usbeg Ali actually smiled.

ROBERT LANCASTER, watching like a ferret with his one eye, and possessed of sense enough to toss aside conclusions as he found them wrong, decided that Dick Anthony was not a man to frighten into doing things. His plan had been to threaten Dick next with a synopsis of the Cossack plans to capture him; he could have guessed at what he did not know for certain. But it was too obvious that, since Dick need not fear his own Government, he need not fear Russia yet; arrested, he need only claim a hearing, and whatever the Russians would do to a mere unknown civilian, Dick could demand that they respect the King's commission, held by an Anthony of Arran. Dick, he felt sure, would have nerve enough to dare all the Cossack officers on earth, now that he knew his own honor to be safe.

"I suppose you'll go home, then, Mr. Anthony?" he said.

"I have three years' leave of absence," answered Dick.

"Then may I ask what you propose to do?"

"To listen. Weren't you making me an offer?"

"Yes. I was asking you to help Persia. I was asking you to help rid these suffering provinces of the worst burden—the most dastardly imposition—that ever a land groaned under."

"But why should *you* ask, on behalf of Persia?" Dick demanded. "I wouldn't object to service under the Persian Government, given proper guarantees and permission from the War Office; but what have you or your firm got to do with it?"

"We have many millions, Mr. Anthony, invested in northern Persia. If the Okhrana makes good its footing—in other words, if it succeeds in following up the thin end of the wedge with the thick end—we stand to lose those millions, for the Okhrana shares nothing with anybody; it is above the law, and it sucks clean to the dry bone! We are ready and willing to spend more millions to defend what we have spent already. We can not get the British Government to help us, though God knows we

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have tried. We will not, if we can help it, stand by and see Russia—nose-led by organized conspiracy—penetrate, and occupy, and keep, as she is doing in defiance of all promises and treaties." He leaned forward, and again the long forefinger pointed straight at Dick. *"We have been waiting for a man—for the man!"*

"To do what?"

"To lead!"

"To lead whom?"

"Persia!"

"As a British officer," said Dick, "I couldn't take part in any revolution even if I cared to." His words were prompt and uncompromising; but there might have been an undernote of disappointment or regret.

"You are not invited to take part in any revolution. The Persian Government is making the most heroic efforts in all Persian history to throw off this cruel Russian yoke. If the Persians win, they will observe their financial engagements, as Russia would never do should she win; Russia pays her own debts, but she would pay Persia's never—never, my friend! That is why my firm and other financiers are so emphatically on Persia's side! That is why we are willing to finance a strong man, who dares, and who can, take command of the patriots who are now in hiding. You are asked to fight *for* Persia, not against her—to strengthen Persia, not lead a revolution! Man, service under the Persian Government in the way you mean, with permission of the War Office, wouldn't be the slightest use. The Russians have their clutch on everything in Teheran. The police, the troops, the politicians, are in Russia's pay. If you weren't shot you would be poisoned within a month, and Russia would make that an excuse for sending yet more Cossacks!"

"Then what *do* you mean?" asked Dick.

"I mean, Mr. Anthony, that the patriots, the few good, loyal men who love Persia and would fight for her, dare not show themselves for fear of Russia. Most of them are in hiding in the mountains—many of them not very far from here. Take command of those men, drive the Cossacks out of northern Persia by quick, stern action, and within two weeks you will have the whole of Persia at your back, and the Great Powers (goaded, remember, by Finance) behind Persia! All that is needed is the courage, and the initial heroic effort!"

"It's tempting enough," laughed Dick, "supposing, of course, that you could prove your authority for making promises. Your firm, I suppose, would ship arms and ammunition, and I haven't a doubt they could be smuggled. I'd like the adventure. But I must refuse as a British officer, if for no other reason."

Robert Lancaster detected a movement of Usbeg Ali's eye that gave him unexplained encouragement. He looked at Andry and read disappointment on the big man's face. It was plain that Dick would not lack backing from his own contingent, could he but be persuaded; and evidently Usbeg Ali Khan did not yet believe that the argument was closed. Finance is never at the end of its tether; so long as it remains at all, it is a power; and its servants emulate it. So long as he could speak, Robert Lancaster could voice an argument.

"Will you talk to these patriots, Mr. Anthony, and say a few words to encourage them? Will you hear the story straight from them?"

"Certainly," said Dick. "I'd be glad to talk to them."

"Then the sooner the better!"

"First, though," said Dick, "I need food for my men, horses and transportation."

"I was coming to that," said Lancaster. He turned to Usbeg Ali Khan. "You," he said, "are the least likely of the party to be recognized. Will you be good enough to take my horse and a message I will write to a place about ten miles away from here? My signature under a requisition will be enough to produce everything needed."

"I take my orders from Anthony Sahib!" said the Afghan.

"Go, please," said Dick. "I'll give you money to pay for things."

"I beg your pardon," said Lancaster. "You have accepted my invitation to hear the case of Persia at first hand. You are therefore the guest of my firm until your trip is over. I pay for everything—horses, food, tents, and transportation."

"Oh, very well," said Dick. "We'll go outside while you write the letter."

Some twenty minutes later Robert Lancaster gave Usbeg Ali Khan repeated, definite directions, and the Afghan drove his heels in. The horse leaped forward like a shaft, bow-driven. He *was* a shaft, if they all had known it, out of the bow of Fate—a shaft that bore a message of the coming of deliverance to Persia.

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"Ma spine tickles!" said Andry, looking into Dick's eyes.

"Scratch it, then!" said Dick.

"Na, na, let tickle—it means fechtin'!"

III

IF DICK ANTHONY supposed that by escaping out of Russia into Persia he had shaken off the Princess Olga Karageorgovich, that was clear proof of his ignorance of women. He was wilfully, deliberately ignorant of any but the type his mother had been, and she had died so long ago that he had canonized her memory. To think ill of the sex she had adorned would have been sacrilege and, since he detested sacrilege, he avoided women carefully and ran no risks.

He was boy enough to expect women to avoid him in return. There was no "one woman" whom he loved; therefore it did not enter his dreams that "one woman" might love him and make a hero of him. To himself, he was a man who did his fighting best to be a gentleman and not a hero in the very least degree.

There had been one or two—good women—who had seen, had heard, had smiled at the contagion of his smile, had thanked the God who made good men for not-yet-vanished chivalry, and then had understood and passed out of his life with women only know what bitter sorrow. Such incidents had strengthened his belief in the inherent goodness of the rest.

So by the time he met the Princess Olga Karageorgovich, he had learned to show too-attentive women very gently how he could be chivalrous and yet not lovesick; he had learned to expect that they would take their own leave of him then, and if there were heart-burnings he saw none, and was too modest to suspect their possibility. The Princess Olga had taken leave of him, a little ostentatiously, on the deck of a Russian tramp at Trebizond; and, though he had been certain that it was her voice whispering orders through a hole in a wall at Baku, he felt quite sure now that pride must have come to her aid and have made her see the impropriety of following him farther. Decent, gallant, gentlemanly, foolish Dick Anthony!

She loved him more she-tigerishly each time that he broke away from her. She had lost him at each attempt yet, because he was too honest, too direct and strong, to be taken in any but a Samson-snare; but she learned her lesson and grew doubly dangerous; and each time he escaped her the hot fires in her glowed anew, until passion was love at last, and she who had always laughed at love was now alight with it.

Fate piled the odds a hundred high against Dick Anthony when Olga Karageorgovich, Princess of Russia, and arch-decoy for Russia's underworld—whose power was the strength of the Okhrana, whose youth and beauty were twin foils for her ambition, loveliest, most versatile, least squeamish of all women—set her heart on him.

But the Princess Olga Karageorgovich had recognized a greatness such as none of the men in her swaggering class could show, nor any in her other underworld of plots and practising. Her main claim to usefulness was her ability to read what lay behind men's outer bluff, and for the first time in her life she had met a man who had no bluff about him, but was true. And, having met, she wanted.

While Cossack officers still cursed the stern of a boat that disappeared into a Caspian hurricane, she was already sending telegrams. Questions and replies, orders and acknowledgments, Dick's minute description, even to his scars, flashed back and forth through a whole storm-shrieking night. Then, having satisfied herself that unless he drowned—and she did not believe he *could* drown—there would be no slightest chance of his escaping from her net, she went to bed and slept a whole day, contented. Then she sent more telegrams.

FIVE evenings later she and her maid applied their united genius to the task of dressing her so cunningly that Innocence herself would have wondered at such sweet simplicity. Jeweled and orchid-decked, she attended a ball that was all but quite official; there were very few men there who were not in uniform; the dowager, who lent the social countenance which even she, the least convention-bound of women, dared not dispense with, was the wife of a lieutenant-governor; and only Russia could have staged the scene, the gaiety, the pace, the daring, and the grim, deep-lying, ever-conscious discipline.

She danced with a dozen men whose breasts were a blaze of decorations, and her

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talk was inane to the last degree of up-to-the-minute asininity. But she found her way at last to a sitting-out place between half-tropical ferns and flowers on the arm of a man who wore no decorations, but who carried himself in his black dress-suit as if all the responsibility for all Russia rested on him.

"Well?" he asked, when he had satisfied himself that none could overhear. "Is this to be another Egypt? More millions of rubles, more promises, still less result?"

"I have done my utmost in each instance," said the Princess, divining that she stood on the verge of danger.

"Certain other precautions have been taken this time," he said. "Anthony meets with approval—the very firebrand for the business!—but your plan goes into the discard. Yes, we have a better plan."

"Have I a part in it?" she asked, with as little display of interest as she dared show.

"Yes, once again," he added darkly. "There is a telegram this evening. Lancaster of Teheran, who has been a joke to us so many times, went hunting on the shore of Hassan Kuli Bay. His servants deserted—with his loose change, I expect—and were caught by Cossacks looking out for Anthony; they report that Anthony and his men landed and burned their boat within a mile of Lancaster's camp. What do you know of Lancaster?"

"Nothing," said the Princess, and the man beside her raised his eyebrows.

"Lancaster calls himself a banker, and is agent for big financial interests. He has missed no opportunity for the last three years of trying to find a leader for the so-called 'Patriotic Party' in northern Persia, and he offers financial backing to every likely man who comes his way. Scouts report Anthony in his tent. The conclusion is obvious."

He waited for about two minutes, to see whether the Princess would not leap to the conclusion; but she kept silence.

"He will offer Anthony what amounts to a kingdom. Being a British officer, Anthony will probably decline, although he *may* accept, in which case our game is won. But let us suppose that he declines. The plan is then thoroughly to insult him and force him to reprisals; I understand he is not the man to swallow an insult readily."

The Princess chuckled. "He will fight!" she asserted.

"He will be forced into a fight, if there is any fight in him, and then driven to the mountains, where he will find a crowd of fellow fugitives, and will no doubt recall Lancaster's offer of financial backing."

"Well?" said the Princess.

"Being a British officer, he will make things very inconvenient for his own people. Great Britain will not ask questions, nor endeavor to protect him. That gives us an entirely free hand. Anthony is to be harried from pillar to post, but never killed or caught until he has given us excuse enough for occupying northern Persia with two or even three army corps. Under the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907 we may do nothing prejudicial to the autonomy of Persia; but the presence of an outlaw of his type in the mountains would be very prejudicial to it, and we would have a right to act for Persia's protection. Having acted, of course, northern Persia would be in our possession. Possession is nine points of the law, and——"

"And Richard Anthony is then mine!" said the Princess unguardedly.

"No," said the grim man at her side, decisively. "By that time Mr. Anthony will have ceased to be useful and will have grown dangerous. Your shall choose his tombstone if you wish!"

She opened her lips to say something, but he cut short the discussion by offering his arm, and led her back to the din and glitter of the dancing-floor.

"In the meantime we can make use of your talents," he said quietly in her ear. He bowed frigidly to a man who came to claim her. "There will be a cachet of instructions for you in a day or two," he whispered. Then he walked away. She whirled with a medaled partner into the glittering maelstrom, and he betook himself to a card-room, where other men in uniform were gambling for very heavy stakes.

IV

AT THE end of ten miles of savagely bad going Usbeg Ali's thoughts were interrupted by sight of a battered caravansary whose walls bore traces of more than one Cossack visitation in the shape of bullet-marks. The gate was shut, but he shouted, and the man in charge came out to parley, only to be kept waiting while the Afghan made a keen-eyed survey of the

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ground. Then it did not sweeten Usbeg Ali's humor in the least that a Cossack officer should swagger out beneath the gate, look him over with studied insolence, read the letter, and nod contemptuous permission before he was admitted.

"I smelled Cossacks from two miles away!" he vowed, riding in. "Phaugh!"

But the officer went out of sight, and no amount of cavalierly swearing or loud-voiced Eastern innuendo could bring him back again. Moreover, the Russian's leave seemed to have included more than it might have done; the keeper of the caravansary came down from the heights of arrogant suspicion to the deeps of groveling servility, and the stables were thrown open that Usbeg Ali might make choice.

The horses, except for three of them, were a sorry bunch of crocks, and the men who lined up to go in charge of them were sorrier-looking yet. Their groveling servility did no more than help arouse the suspicion latent in Usbeg Ali's Oriental mind and to put him, soldierwise, on the offensive.

"The letter called for men, not monkeys," he asserted; "horses, not Cossack food!"

"The prince is pleased to jest," said the Persian, cringing low. "These are the post-horses of the Government post-service——"

"Aye! Fed like the Government on Russian promises!" swore Usbeg Ali. Then he pointed with a gesture of scorn to the ragged line of men. "These be thy sons and grandsons, probably?"

The Persian scowled. "These men go with the horses, and will bring them back," he answered.

"So, father of a flock of billy-goats! Thy offspring do thee a great credit; they stink and look like the true old stock!"

He continued to heap ridicule on them, and to think of and suggest unspeakable relationships, until a more than usually acid jest produced a loud laugh from a room above the gate and betrayed the whereabouts of the Cossack officer.

"Who has *his* orders?" roared Usbeg Ali instantly. "Step forward—march!"

He signified the hidden officer with a movement of his thumb, and at once, brow-beaten and bereft of half their senses, twelve of the men took a pace toward him.

"Ha!" he laughed. "Then I take the others! To Johannum with you twelve, or to Russia (the two are one)! Line up, the rest! About turn! Ten of you are enough; take each two horses—twenty horses in all—so! Are there no Cossacks who will come with me?" he shouted derisively. "I would dearly love to teach a dozen Cossacks discipline!"

But the Russian in the room above the gate gave not another sign of his existence, although Usbeg Ali took good care that his voice should carry; nor did he give the signal from the wall above that would have brought a half squadron thundering down from a mile-off hill to avenge his hurt feelings. He behaved as no Cossack officer would dream of doing excepting when under orders.

But Usbeg Ali, however he chose to seem, was no mere loud-mouthed brawler. The taunts he flung and his atrocious insults may have seemed gratuitous, but good reason underlaid his insolence. As he rode in he had seen the fresh dung and the hoof-marks of two or three troops at least. He was quite sure they would not have left their unattended officer far behind, or for any length of time. Therefore this was a plan, and possibly a trap.

He had proved to his satisfaction that no reprisals were to be allowed just yet, whatever he did or said. And well he knew his Asia. Full well he knew that first impressions should be rubbed in hard; and he, too, had a plan, quick-plucked out of uncertainty. He took all Cossacks' and all Russia's name in vain at the top of his lungs, impressing on the Persians his own fearlessness and the Cossack officer's unusual lack of arrogance—to put the least construction on it.

"Do you feed that Cossack double-headed eagle in the cage up there on worms or pig-meat?" he jeered.

"Why is there no answer?" wondered the stable-hands. "Why is he not arrested or shot down? Is the officer afraid?"

And while the Cossack up in his hiding-place swore between set teeth and the others wondered, Usbeg Ali satisfied himself on certain points to the degree of absolute conviction.

"So the Russians back in Baku know that we have landed, eh?" he reasoned. "For me—an Afghan—there would be no orders to hold hard. The Cossacks would have leave to work their sweet will on me and my seven. They know Dee-k-Antonee has landed, and they have learned by telegraph a description of him and of his prow-

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ess that has turned their bones to water! So far, so good!"

But his war-trained brain assured him there had been a trap laid. Orders given in advance to stable-hands, and troops of cavalry that galloped out of sight when one man came, were proof to him of preconcerted plan.

"Perhaps," he argued to himself, "they have heard how Dee-k-Antonee slit a road for the rest of us through the Cossack ranks in Baku, and they wait this time for a regiment or two! But nay, that can not be! By the tracks I saw I know they are more than a hundred, and we be ten men, and they know it! Nay! A hundred are not afraid of ten! It is the woman! It is that Princess woman who is after him! She has given orders he must not be slain—she wants him alive! So-ho, there has been a trap laid, eh? So that is why the Cossacks dare not answer insults? Insults, eh? Allah prod my memory!"

WHILE the men packed provisions on three of the horses, he sat his horse below the gateway and sang a Persian song that some humorist composed a hundred years ago who had designs on Russia's fame. Line after line and verse after verse punned around the theory that Russia's name and infamy are one. The mere mention of its title, as a rule, is cause enough to set Cossacks shouting for a *knout;* yet the man in uniform in the little four-square room above the gate kept silent.

So, with a final cat-call of derision and a last peppery jest, that included all Russia and all Cossacks, horse, infantry, and guns, in one atrocious summary, Usbeg Ali marshaled his little party and set it clattering through the gate in the direction of the camp. He waited under the gate, where he was reasonably safe, for two or three minutes, listening for the sound of a breech-block or of revolver mechanism; but he heard no suggestion of reprisals.

So he galloped on as hard as his horse could scamper, making a difficult target of himself as a matter of principle. (Soldiers, he believed, are killed oftenest and made prisoners oftenest when overconfident.)

"Are we all Mohammedans?" he asked at the top of his lungs as he caught up. He laid calculated emphasis on the unexpected "we."

"Aye—aye—aye!" came the ready answers; for even in Persia, where religion, as well as every other virtuous thing, has been corrupted and debauched by Russia's agents, a hint at the unity of Islam is even still the surest bridge to common ground.

"And that louse-bound Cossack officer, skulking up yonder in his chamber to save his skin, what might he be? Pig-fed, by any chance? Aye—the pig-lice crawl on him! His saddle and his boots are pig-skin, and he smears the pig-grease in his hair!"

Not much of the indictment was even approximately true, but that did not prevent a grin and a murmur of applause; for Usbeg Ali had lit shrewdly on the only prejudice all Persia holds in common. The meanest atheist eschews the thought of pig—and some Cossacks eat pig, or anything.

"Ho! Followers of Islam!" He flattered them at the limit of his soldier-lungs, well knowing that not one of the ragged ten deserved the title. "I lead you now to see a man of men, to see a warrior, to see a king, who landed in the morning mist with a sword hung at his side that once Iskander wore—Iskander!—the sword of him who conquered all the world!"

He waited to let the name of Alexander the Great sink in and work on their sleepy minds.

"Ho! But ye are favored!" he began again. "Ho! But ye are fortunate, since Allah chose ye to be first to see Iskander come again—the same Iskander, the Great Iskander, bearing a new name—now called Dee-k-Antonee. Ye will be the first to see him—great, golden-headed—tended by his giant, and girded with a two-edged sword, sharp for the slaying!"

They were all ears now, for in Persia all the warring sects, and unbeliefs as well, unite to almost deify Alexander of Macedon. There is no tale too wild to tell about him, no prophecy about him too far-fetched to win belief. He has become a myth, and all the fairy-tales and fabulous adventures have been added to his actual accomplishments; and, as should be, his failings have been relegated to oblivion or his enemies.

USBEG ALI, pulling out and riding a little to the right that he might keep the line in something like military order, saw with his watchful soldier-eye that he had their whole attention. So then he began to sing a song to them, that he composed in Persian as he rode, to a wild,

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appealing tune that got its birth where ice-winds rip down from the Himalayas—a tune to curdle a man's marrow, and yet make him ache for more.

He sang of the dawn of history, and mixed his facts and dates until he had Mohammed, Allah's Prophet, and Iskander both together in one blast of conquest. And they believed the song, where words in unimaginative prose would very likely have set them to disputing. How could poetry be otherwise than true? Did not Allah make all poetry?

He sang about the Great Iskander's sword that the Prophet gave him, with the charge to establish Islam—the two-edged sword with a beryl in the hilt, "than which no greater beryl, nor a bluer, nor a stone more strangely cut, had yet been seen by living man." He made up a veritable saga on the sword's account, more than half believing it himself before the words had left his lips, and ready to believe it quite and swear to it on the Koran within a week.

He told how, when the conquest of the earth was finished and Iskander stood, alone in prayer, on a Himalayan summit, where the roots of heaven rested, he stretched up the sword, hilt first, to heaven, saying he had done what he set out to do. And an eagle came, sang Usbeg Ali—a white eagle with green eyes, who bore the sword away between his talons.

He sang then how the eagle flew with the sword forever back and forth between the earth and sun until, in Allah's hour, another Great Iskander—this time King of Scotland, in Faranghistan, but according to Usbeg Ali none the less a good Mohammedan, needed aid against his enemies.

Then, so ran the rambling saga, the eagle flew at Allah's bidding and, giving the sword to this new Iskander, bade him choose a man to wield it in the fight. He chose a man among his chieftans who was known as Antonee and—that, he sang, meant golden-headed, fearless one—giving him the sword, as ordered, and sending him to lead the van. Then, lo! the enemy was vanquished. Then the fleets of foreign tyrants were wide-scattered on the sea. Then came the eagle with another prophesy that now, even now, that minute, near the Caspian, was ripening to be fulfilled.

Father to son, eldest-born to eldest-born, the clan of Antonee should have that sword in keeping, until there should be born into the line a king with golden hair, whose name would be Dee-k-Antonee. "For does not *Dee* in the language of Faranghistan mean *He will conquer?*" Dee-k-Antonee should prove to be none other than the Great Iskander come to life again, and he should take the sword down from its resting-place and bear it over-sea until he reached the Caspian. There, screamed at by the eagle, he should step out of the morning mist, to conquer where he led of old time. "He has come!" Usbeg Ali ended in a gorgeous flight of fancy. "The eagle screamed! A mist split open! He has come! Dee-k-Antonee has come!"

He neglected to invent a reason why this new Iskander should not seem to be Mohammedan. Perhaps he thought it better not to call attention yet to the delinquency. Surely the shrewd, imaginative soldier did not dream that Dick could be induced to stomach Islam!

To call Dick's tawny, close-cropped hair golden was but poetic license; he incurred no risk of disappointing them, for after that song of his they were ready to imagine anything, given the least excuse. Red and gold were near enough! So was the legend near enough! There *had* been once an Alexander who was king of Scotland; there *had* been an Anthony who fought for him at Largs, to whom he gave a sword after the fight as a token of distinction. The descendant of that Anthony, with what was said to be that sword, *had* landed that morning on the Caspian shore! Many and many a national saga, that men would rather die than disbelieve, is grounded on a lesser truth than that!

AND the luck was all with Usbeg Ali, as it usually is with men whose eyes are skinned and whose wit plays second to their pluck. Dick, who would have been mad-angry had he guessed a fragment of the Afghan's game, and who would never under any circumstances have agreed to it, was all unwittingly setting the stage to rights and getting ready for a perfect climax.

Bored, as he always was when there was nothing strenuous and difficult to do, he had pulled his bagpipes and Andry's out of their joint traveling-bag. He played a tune or two, and Andry tried as well, but was prevented by his injured arm. So Lancaster took Andry's pipes, and Dick gave him

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a lesson, with Andry lying down, looking on.

Lancaster, who had not a note of music in his soul, nor any ethics other than his loyalty to High Finance, failed utterly to coax the semblance of a tune out of the thing. But he was childishly, sillily amused with the weird discords he could make, and chose to lie on his camp-bed after a while and send excruciating cries through the chanter at uncertain intervals. So Dick put his own pipes away and, because to do nothing was the hardest work he knew, bethought him of the boar's blood on his claymore. Usually Andry cleaned the sword and kept it brighter than a mirror; now Dick busied himself about the polishing and took his time doing the job thoroughly.

And while Dick polished, Usbeg Ali's active brain was busy, at the canter, contriving new details of his plan. Well he understood by this time Dick's danger and the probable impossibility of making Dick believe in the extent of it. With a soldier's ready wit he had seized instantly on the opportunity to create support for Dick of a kind that would be likely to act first and argue afterward. Like the Russian Government, Usbeg Ali wanted Dick committed to a course. Unlike the Russian Government, he wanted that course to be along the road to Kabul, and he prayed, as did Russia, for an insurrection in the hills, in order that Dick might be driven in the right direction. But he did not trouble to look very far ahead. First, support; then, the fighting; after that Allah would attend to things, and none knew Allah's plans!

He wanted this rabble of a post-horse party to be Dick's advance-guard, the messengers of rumor, sowing rumor. It suited him better that they were not fighting-men, but the meanest of the mean along that frontier; their very meanness would give them access where men who dared have high chins would be shot at sight. He did not try to stir their martial courage, supposing that they had any; he even took care to quench whatever sparks of it his saga might have stirred. But he worked on their imaginations to the limit of his power and of their credulity.

"Listen," he shouted, "followers of Islam!" And they loved him while they listened, because he accorded them a title to which none of them had any right; to a man they were rank backsliders. "First, we will canter to the seashore where will be seven men of my race. So ran the prophecy! There will be seven Afghans waiting by the sea, with saddles but no horses, with baggage but no transport, with no sign of a ship that brought them, and yet with new, unsoiled shoes in proof that they did not march! Them we will take with us!"

"Witchcraft!" murmured one man to another, and Usbeg Ali heard him. For a little while longer he saw fit to sing Dick's praises and work up their curiosity until it was irresistible; but he did not say or sing a word to undermine the witchcraft notion; he always accepted any luck that Allah sent him! He merely did his best to keep their nerves unstartled for the present, and to build up the makings of a stampede when the time should come.

ONCE the party did stop on the way. The inevitable self-appointed spokesman for the crowd argued that such miserable men as they were no fit men to greet the Great Iskander. He would be angry. Then what would their advantage be? Where was the profit in beholding greatness, if the greatness slew them?

So Usbeg Ali laughed and sang, and warned them they must look and run.

"Deliver ye the horses, gaze, and run for your lives then, True Believers! What are these ye bring? Horses? Fit horses, these, for the great Dee-k-Antonee? Such galls! Such sore-backs! Such spavins! Such empty bellies and lean ribs! Nay, look ye once and run! Wait not for his wrath! Run then to the mountains and win merit by proclaiming who has come! Bid them get better horses! Bid them prepare a welcome! Whither would ye run now—to the Cossacks? Ye were there—ye heard what I said! Ye may guess what a friendship the Cossack officer will feel for underlings who listened to the talk I gave him! Ye listened, and then came with me! Think what the Cossacks will do if ye return! Nay, ye had better ride ahead, where I will befriend you, and then run to the hills where no Cossacks are!"

He convinced them partly with jeers, partly with argument, and most of all by stirring their insensate curiosity. Within ten minutes he had them cantering on again, close-huddled in a little timid pack, conveying a sense of nervous expectancy to the

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horses down the sinews of their trembling legs.

They cantered in sight of the two white tents and swerved for the seashore instantly. For a mile or two then Usbeg Ali made strange signals as he rode; he assured them that he waved his arms to guard against witchcraft and powers unseen, and they grew less timid as they saw no seven Afghans, though their eyes could search the whole plain down to the seashore reeds.

But Usbeg Ali left off signaling. And suddenly seven armed men in turbans leaped from the long, coarse grass and leveled automatic pistols at them in grim silence. Usbeg Ali gave curt orders in a tongue they did not understand, and the seven mounted. After that there was no chance of escape, for each of the seven had a dagger at his belt and a hand that twitched to use it. In silence, most unwillingly, the Persians rode the mile that lay between them and the tents, noting with fear-widened eyes a pile of baggage that was left behind, that there was no sign of a ship, and that the seven wore new shoes!

An eagle soared overhead, following the *cortège* with uncanny persistence. True, this eagle was not white, but they had forgotten by this time that the eagle of Usbeg Ali's saga was a white one; and who could tell whether this bird had green eyes or not? He looked big enough to hold a saber in his talons, and they would have sworn on the Koran that he did so hold a saber had Usbeg Ali asked them to. They would have sworn to anything. It took the ceaseless vigilance of all of Usbeg Ali's men and many a hint in gesture to prevent them from stampeding, particularly when there came, surely from the eagle overhead (they were ready to swear to that, too), a weird, wild, disconcerting note that set the gooseflesh rising and the terror crawling up and down their backbones. An eagle who made a noise like that most positively had green eyes!

But a word in a tongue they did not know brought the daggers out of the belts of Usbeg Ali's men; and a death that is close beside is worse than a death not yet discernible; they chose the lesser of two dangers, and rode on. They rode very slowly, very grudgingly, but the mile rolled up, and the two white tents drew near, and a man, with a drawn sword in his hand, arose from between the tents to look at them.

They halted then. They were beyond the zone of argument. They would rather die, and they would have died rather than ride on another yard.

True to Usbeg Ali's most minute description of him, with the Caspian sunrays glinting golden from his bare red head, a man stood as kings ought to stand, and smiled as a man should who is unafraid and quite uncovetous. He spoke in a strong, strange voice that carried far, and a giant arose beside him from the grass. Then the eagle screamed again; from nowhere, unless from the sky above, where the eagle turned in widening circles, came a thrice-repeated, thirty-three-times-awful hell-squawk. Usbeg Ali broke the spell with an Afghan oath, that called Allah too to listen to it, and the Persians broke and fled. Over the cruppers, sidewise, forward, anyhow that they could leave the horses, they decamped in a wild stampede, headed for the foothills, that showed low and blue on the very far horizon.

"What did you say to frighten them?" asked Dick. "And why aren't they headed straight for home?"

"Nay, sahib, it was none of my doing!" answered Usbeg Ali. "They fear Cossacks behind them. And as we came they talked of an eagle, and of a man with golden hair, and of bloody war. There is an eagle overhead," he added, looking up.

"Why didn't you bring your baggage along?" asked Dick. "You'd better go for it, and we'll see how far we can travel before night. The mountains tempt me much more than the plain."

"Ma spine still itches!" muttered Andry, reaching around his undamaged arm to scratch. "Unless I'm lousy—an' I'm *not*—that means fechtin', verra sune!"

V

THERE was no pause in the game the Okhrana played, although there did seem a few days of peace while Lancaster led Dick and his party up over the spurs of the Elburz Mountains, traveling far more slowly than the "banker" wished because Dick would not overtax the poor, leg-weary horses. They had no means of knowing that a Cossack regiment had taken advantage of their dallying to make a ring around them and precede them to the hills; their chief anxiety was the

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minor one of how to keep Andry from falling off a horse and how to pick, in turns, the horses that were strong enough to carry him.

But while they laughed at Andry, and Andry swore venomously at the pain in his arm and the hardness of the native saddle, while they camped in the open under Usbeg Ali's blankets, and not even Lancaster troubled to have the tents pitched, there was a trick played in which laughter did not enter back in Baku, where the Princess awaited orders.

She had gone to Egypt trusted to the limit by the secret power that trusts only when its control is absolute; and it had been one thing then to help bribe Egypt's politicians, to pick Dick Anthony from out a swarm of lesser men, and to try to use both for the Okhrana's ends. England's empire was fair enough game, and Dick Anthony a pawn.

But it was another, vastly other thing to sit now and be told that she must trap the man she loved. She had learned to love as only women of her type ever do—so fiercely, so passionately, yet so enduringly that they die unless their energies have rein. She loved like a caged she-tiger; and she looked like a calm, sweet wisp of femininity—something girlish, altogether innocent, as she sat and waited for the man who had promised he would write, but changed his mind and sent word he would come.

But a month or two ago this man would have been taking orders from herself. But she had come back from Egypt having failed, and the Okhrana never overlooks; she knew well that she was more than usually fortunate to have one opportunity to reinstate herself.

Partly impelled by pride, partly by anxiety to save Dick's life, and partly because in the last resort her wish was master of her thought, she had allowed the supposition to gain credence that Dick was her lover as much as she was his. The theory of a lover's quarrel served to save her face, while she contrived a means of making Dick see sense as she saw it; and she would not have been the first woman, by a very long way, to tame her lover in Siberia; her effort to have him arrested needed little explanation.

"WE BELIEVE this love-affair of yours has undermined your loyalty," said the stooped, gray-headed man who called on her. For a moment her look was wild, as the extent of her downfall was borne in on her.

He spoke like a family physician diagnosing a disease, regretting that it should be so, but facing facts. And it was characteristic of the self-propagation of the ever-spreading evil he represented that his accusation, leveled at her then, should be the seed of future double-dealing. Until that minute she had never dreamed, even in her wildest hour, of playing the Okhrana false; but his suggestion of the possibility showed her in a flash a new way to new freedom.

"Do you expect me to waste words denying what you have decided to believe?" she asked.

"No, hardly that. You are advised to listen. We believe that, without exactly knowing it, you have forgotten whom you serve, and have played for your own hand; you are invited to remember that as one of us you are personally altogether unimportant. In that connection, you would do well to remember Stolypin and Plehve, each of whom considered himself greater than the power that raised him."

"Do you think I am afraid of death?" she asked unguardedly. Her cue was to be silent, but even she was not always quite under control.

"There are varieties of death," he smiled, stroking his little gray mustache. "And there are marriages that lead to death through annoying overtures. Now, if your aim should happen to be personal aggrandizement, I recommend a suitable marriage as the proper course."

She shuddered, and he grinned at her for at least a minute. Well she knew that no such punishment as clumsy murder would be necessary in her case.

A word from the Okhrana (and no one knows how high the Okhrana does not reach in Russia), a word from the Czar (and his word, whoever prompts it, is final), and she would be married with terrific ceremony to a man whose rank made him her "equal," whose estates, about the size of Belgium, were a far, forgotten relic of a feudal past—far from society, forgotten by progress, buried beyond the reach of liberty or law.

The Duke, who would be her master then in lieu of the Okhrana, had not enough attractions on his own account to win him a wife without the Czar's assistance.

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"THIS Anthony is likely to be very useful to us—very," said her caller, watching the expression of her face minutely in the full-length mirror opposite. He judged that she had had all the whip it would be good to give her. "Spirited mares should be whipped and shown the road," he told himself.

"Is there no credit due to me for having picked him out, and brought him to Russia and called attention to him?"

"Certainly," he said. "I was coming to that point." He laid a confidential, gloved hand on her knee, and she shuddered again, so he withdrew it. "You chose him, certainly. And however ill you may have managed him in Egypt and elsewhere, it is none the less evident that he is *most* unmanageable, and that you know him better than anybody else does. It happens, too, that there is no other woman with your natural abilities who could be used in northern Persia; there are no roads, no railways, no civilized conveniences—it will not be a picnic!"

Again she shuddered; and again he smiled.

"Then what am I required to do?" she asked in a voice that would have aroused the envy of the greatest actress. She contrived to express submission, the intention to behave, self-abnegation, half-humorous apology, loathing of the thought of Persia, all in one short sentence. There was not a hint of triumph in her note; she was all humility, and even her wonderful eyes looked tamed. So his voice changed too as he grew off his guard. He did not pity her, for the Okhrana pities nobody; but he was convinced.

"Ride. Get in touch with Anthony, and keep in touch with him. It is all-important that somebody we trust should be in touch with him and us, and should keep us posted while at the same time egging him on to the point where we can really advertise him as an insurrection. We want no more 'brigands in being'; the press of Europe and America has seen through that game, and of all the brigands we have subsidized there has not been one who was man enough to amount to anything; it has been like turning one steer at a time into a bull-ring. Some of them robbed a few foreigners, and the foreign Governments complained enough for us to send down a few more *sotnias*, but we want an army there, and nothing less. As excuse for a real army, we want somebody bigger than a brigand. Do you follow me?"

She nodded, and her eyes had taken on the look of dreamy, distant innocence they always wore when she was thinking fastest and most dangerously. Truly she followed him! She followed him, and went a distance farther!

"What excuse will there be, to give him, and to give the world, for my presence in northern Persia?" she asked.

"Concessions—title-deeds!" he answered promptly. "Your father, of sainted memory—" he smiled sardonically, and she eyed him sidewise with a glance that was untranslatable—"bought, for a consideration, certain lands in the Elburz Mountain Range, with all the mineral-rights. As his heiress you have the undoubted right to travel and inspect those lands. As a princess of Russia, it is only proper that a *sotnia* of Cossacks, at the least, should go with you for your protection, or should at least be at your disposal. Is that not so?"

"The title-deeds?" she asked.

"We have them—here—in this." He touched a small portfolio.

"Genuine or forged?"

"There always was sufficient doubt about the doings of your—ah—sainted father to—ah—lend obscurity to the related facts," he answered. "In this instance, my idea is that there might be ground for a dispute, in the course of which, perhaps, the Persian Government might do something ill-advised, and—ah—we seem, in fact, forearmed against all contingencies."

"Then I am to claim possession of mineral-lands?"

"Yes. No need, though, to send in an official claim at once. Explain all you like, but write little. For our part, we will see to a very keen censorship on everything coming out of Persia; no news will come through without our editing, and very little news, if any, will reach the British Minister in Teheran. We will send down rifles and ammunition for Anthony to capture, immediately you give the word; and if you let us know that Lancaster's friends want to run some guns to him, we'll see to it that the guns get through. Get in touch with Anthony as quickly as you can. Encourage him. Play the traitress. To the world, you are traveling to inspect your late father's property. To Anthony, you are there

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only to help him, and you will do well to pretend to help him against Russia. And mind you help him! Help him to the point where he is big enough to justify an army corps against him! Do you understand?"

"Quite," she said quietly.

"Your prerogatives are not curtailed in any way. You indent for what you want. You draw for what money you may need, on whatever bank may be convenient. The details of your movements may be of your own devising; in fact, you are not hampered in any way. But on this occasion you are invited to succeed! No more millions of rubles, please, without result to us! The Okhrana does not give—it buys!"

They talked on and on, but always the tenor of his argument amounted to the same. "You have a free hand; you will work behind closed doors; you may draw upon unlimited reserves; the wires are yours, the troops, and the police; you are above the law. But—*don't fail this time!*" He gave her a new code-book, whose key had to be memorized, and a map or two to show the distances and means of communication. Then he left her to her own devices, to undertake a "campaign" from whose difficulties and discomforts ninety per cent. of grown men would have flinched.

He left her, chuckling to himself at the thought of Persian "roads" and caravansaries and "bite-the-stranger" bugs, chuckling at the cruelty to be inflicted on her and the awful difficulty of her task. But she engaged her passage over the Caspian and set out smiling. She set out happier than she had been since the midnight when she nestled in Dick's arms on the deck of the stricken Greek steamer and he had fought like a bull at bay for her life.

And, to show what her magnetism was and how complete her charm, her maid—a cosmopolitan, typical lady's maid—refused to be left behind, but grumbling bitterly at the destination and doubling all its horrors in her own imagination, made ready to share the road. The same maid would have seen any other mistress dead before she would have budged a mile away from trains and taxicabs. The same maid bore scars on her body that the Princess had inflicted before they came to understand each other quite so well.

VI

ONLY one law runs in northern Persia—a totally illegal one of Russia's imposition, giving leave to Russia's agents to arrest on mere suspicion of being a Russian subject. Arrest means imprisonment without trial; and imprisonment, under Russian auspices, implies every horror, describable and indescribable, that can take place behind closed doors.

So the Persians who had fled at the sight of Dick and the scream of the bagpipes played by Lancaster gave them more than ordinary haste. Provided there is fear to drive them or lust to draw, Easterns of their type can travel faster across country than most cavalry can move, and until they reached the foothills these fled like blown dust, for fear whispered to them while they ran that one Cossack with but half an eye could see and shoot them all across the level land. But once in the foothills, where one army could have hidden from another, Eastern lethargy regained its rule, and while they dawdled a regiment of Cossacks overtook them, passed them while they hid, and apparently cared nothing about any presence but its own.

For sake of appearances, the Russian Commandant had written orders with him that bade him hunt "*brodyagi*" in the Elburz Mountains; the orders were a sample of the cunning that underlies all Russia's moves. *Brodyagi* is the generic name for fugitives from Siberia; and very few of those reach any frontier, for the trails are fierce and the countryside is armed aganist them; the orders, though, implied almost a traffic in *brodyagi* into northern Persia, assumed a right to hunt across the border for them, and implied that Persia would not or else could not do the work herself. There was not a word mentioned in the writing about Dick Anthony, who was the real, and only real, reason for the Cossacks' march.

At a point where three hill-spurs coincided at a ridge and the only passage to the mountain-range beyond was a neck of land, well wooded, that narrowed gradually to a notch of fifty feet between two cliffs, to open again into a natural walled amphitheater, the Russians bivouacked. And there, one by one, eight of the straggling, leg-weary victims of Usbeg Ali Khan's imagination strolled into the trap and were made prisoners; they were recognized instantly and

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flogged by Russian Cossacks for having deserted a Persian service. It was the crack of a *knout* and a victim's scream that warned the last two in time; they turned aside, climbed the unclimbable, preferring nearly certain death to the chance of Cossack mercy, and hurried to the mountains by a jackal-trail. They reached a camp of refugees in a valley of the next range half dead and wholly convincing because they had been so thoroughly convinced themselves.

"Dee-k-Antonee has come!" they insisted. "He has come with his sword, and his giant, and his eagle, and his eight Afghans, to conquer all the world and drive the Russians off it! Even now there is a regiment of Cossacks in a trap, and Dee-k-Antonee is on his way to massacre them!"

THEY were telling their story for the twentieth time to a swarm of fierce, bearded men who listened with cocked rifles on their knees and cursed at each mention of the name of Russia, when Dick Anthony, blissfully unconscious of impending trouble, breasted the rise before the Russians' gap, riding at the head of his little party.

There was no secret about Dick's coming, nor any about the way he felt. He was happy to be living in the open, happy to have men behind him whom he trusted, much too happy to be troubled by Lancaster's incessant grumbling. The world seemed very pleasant to him; he had four hundred pounds a year to his name that was piling up at home; he had the best part of three years yet in which to wander where he chose; and he was being useful in the meantime; he was riding now to put new heart in men who needed it, and to promise them that the British public should be made aware of their predicament.

Over and again he thanked Providence, devoutly and reverently, that he should be an Anthony of Arran and that therefore men at home would listen to him and believe when he told what he had seen. His whole nature thrilled at the thought of serving an all-but-lost cause and stirring a forlorn hope; even the poor old horse he rode, which was recovering under decent treatment from the rigors of Persian post-service, gathered new spirit and cavorted as it sensed the thrill. Dick was still bareheaded—still satisfied that the hair God gave him was enough for all purposes. The old two-edged sword with its jeweled basket-hilt still hung from an old Sam Brown belt at his hip; and his mood as he rode was advertised by the tune he played, for the rocks to echo back. He had his precious bagpipes out, and over his shoulder the beribboned drones were monotoning their fierce accompaniment to "Scots Wha Hae!"

"HALT!" rang a sudden order, and Dick halted. A Cossack outpost brought his rifle to the challenge, and the music ceased.

"Put your hands up!"

The soldier spoke in Russian, but Dick understood him.

"Shoot, if you feel that way!" he said in English; then he legged his horse forward, feeling nearly certain that the Russian would not dare, but in a mood to run the risk for the sake of the opportunity of advertising Russia's method. He was riding to encourage men who thought about Russia much as he did, and he was in no mood to admit a Russian's right to challenge him in Persian territory.

At the sound of voices his whole party, except Lancaster and the baggage-train, came cantering up, and Andry, throwing himself out of a saddle that he liked and trusted less than a volcano-top, came close beside him on the two legs he could trust anywhere, under any circumstances. Then a Cossack officer showed himself in the middle of the gap and said something in a quiet voice to the man who had challenged; for answer, the rifle-butt went to the ground again.

"Have a care, sahib!" whispered Usbeg Ali. "See the smoke of twenty fires beyond the rise! They be many and we but ten, for Lancaster sahib is no fighter—he hides already among the baggage-animals!"

"I'll stan' between ye an' yon man there, Mr. Dicky!" said Andry. "I see twa pistols!"

He pressed past, to cover Dick with his great breadth; but Dick seized his shoulder in a grip that hurt and hurled him behind again.

"How long will it take you to learn your place?" he asked savagely. Then his voice changed to its ordinary, confidence-inspiring note as he turned to Usbeg Ali Khan on his other hand; he seemed instantly to have forgotten Andry's interruption, to have

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put it out of mind before the next words left his lips.

"Are you certain we're in Persia?" he asked.

"Surely, Bahadur."

"Quite sure these mountains are not Russian territory?"

"Sahib, they were Persia's since the world began!"

Dick's strange eyes blazed, and had the Russian had the luck to see him once or twice in a fighting mood, as Andry had and Usbeg Ali Khan, he would have called up his regiment there and then and finished the trouble before it could properly begin. But he made the mistake of thinking Dick an ordinary man; and he had his orders, which gave him very little latitude.

"For the love o' Scotland, give me a weapon, somebody!" said Andry in fierce undertones, and Usbeg Ali Khan slipped him a dagger. The rest loosened their sabers in the scabbards and looked to their automatic pistols when they judged the Russian's eye was not on them. Without another word to anybody Dick rode on and they pressed in a cluster after him.

"Halt!" cried the Russian officer.

"For whom?" demanded Dick, still advancing. "Who are you?" He spoke English, for it did not suit his purpose yet, or at any time, to admit that he knew Russian, and he could keep his own counsel more consistently than any man on that frontier. He was in the stiff, guarded, uncompromising, stubborn frame of mind now that has put so many Scotsmen where they are in the councils of the world. But the Russian could not be expected to recognize his master in a mere Scots gentleman with one spare shirt and a bagpipes to his name.

"I am Commandant," he answered, "of this regiment of Cossacks, and at present I blockade this pass!"

He answered in English, and spoke fairly well, although without much fluency.

"On whose behalf?" asked Dick, advancing closer yet. Question and answer all but struck sparks, and the hillsides seemed to listen for the coming outburst. The Russian had grown straight-lipped under his mustache, but it was only Dick's level voice that betrayed emotion; his attitude was one of little more than interest.

"On Persia's behalf," said the Cossack officer.

"Then show me your authority!" said Dick, still advancing. He had satisfied himself by now that the Russian challenge was a bluff, and he hated and despised bluff. Personally he might not appear dangerous, for he had only the claymore in the Sam Brown at his side; but behind him were Usbeg Ali and seven others, with lethal weapons enough to arm twice their number. Had the Russian meant fight, either he would have fired already or would have summoned enough men to make good his boast of a blockade; but instead the officer turned on his heel and, with a motion of his arm that was more than half contemptuous, led the way through the gap.

"Here is my authority!" he smiled.

DOWN two sides of the natural amphitheater a regiment stood by its arms; a little farther off, amid the trees, the horses grazed at the end of picket-ropes, saddled and ready.

"There is no road this way!" sneered the officer, doing his best to pick a quarrel on the first, directest line that offered. "We don't allow Britishers or Afghans or robbers of any kind!"

He could have offered that kind of insult for a week without arousing more than Dick's pity or amusement; but there was a better cue than that, a first-class fighting-cue, all ready for use, that he had staged unwittingly. One of the Persian prisoners left the rest, who were huddled together under the overhanging shelter of a rock, and rushed toward Dick, flinging himself face-downward.

"Get up!" ordered Dick in Persian. But the man lay there, alternately clutching at the horse's forefeet and beating the earth with flat, open palms. There was something hideously pitiful about his attitude and voice, and his words ran into one another like the ravings of a madman.

"Mighty Prince, mighty Prince, O, mighty Prince!" he kept babbling, and presently, his eyes sharpened by suspicion of the Cossack officer's grin, Dick noticed something underneath the man's torn shirt. So he passed his pipes to Andry and dismounted, opening the shirt before the Russian could move to prevent him.

"Did you do that?" he asked, looking straight into the Russian's eyes; and the Russian looked uneasy, for Dick's eyes were the windows of a strong man's strength, and

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strength is not measured by numbers, cartridges, or cutlery.

"I ordered it!" he grinned.

"You skunk!"

The poor, shivering wretch's back was laced and cross-laced with bloody seams where a Cossack *knout* had cut the flesh in strips but a day or two before. The wounds were half washed and festering in places.

"Is he a Russian subject?" demanded Dick.

"God forbid!" said the officer, realizing that he had his quarrel made, and proceeding to bring matters to a head.

"Hurry back and get the emergency-kit from Mr. Lancaster!" Dick ordered savagely, and an Afghan galloped off; but he had no sooner started than the Cossack officer gave orders of his own, and a series of incidents took place too quickly to be stopped by question, act, or argument.

"I'll call you to account for this as surely as I stand on Persian soil!" vowed Dick, all unaware how soon his words would be fulfilled. He had in mind long letters to the *Times* and to the Foreign Office, and questions to be asked in Parliament and in the House of Lords. It was the Russian who took action that withdrew the settlement from diplomatic channels.

TWO dozen Cossacks doubled at his bidding and took position, in two lines facing, in the middle of the amphitheater. Four more men seized the wretched Persian almost from under Dick's feet, and ran with him; they laid him face downward between the two lines, and another man—a non-commissioned officer—stepped forward, armed with a knotted *knout*. He whirled the lash above his head and cracked it until the poor wretch on the ground shrieked in anticipation.

"I will show you," said the officer, addressing Dick, "what insolent and disobedient people may expect at my hands!" He had not moved; he was standing between Dick and the victim, and for one minute Dick was spell-bound. He had read and he had heard, but he had never believed that such brutality was possible. "This man was ordered to lie yonder with the others; he has disobeyed; now watch what he gets for disobedience!—Begin!" he ordered, signing to the sergeant.

Crack! came the whip. The suffering Persian moaned and writhed as blood welled out anew across his quivering back. *Thud!* went a fist—Dick Anthony's—and the Cossack officer reeled backward, staggered, fell.

"You bloody fiend!"

The dam was down now, and the law of nations melted into supposititious nothing, together with all theories of odds. Dick, with eight behind him, did not choose to run, nor yet to stand and see iniquity. Dick's sword was out; no word passed, but a whole regiment could read his offer to finish matters there and then. And behind Dick, Usbeg Ali and six Afghans dismounted, sent their horses galloping back the way they came in proof that there would be no flinching, and drew too. Only Andry had no weapon that was worth a giant's while; but he had what was better. His injured right arm would have spoiled his swordplay, but it was supple enough by now to let his fingers dance along a chanter.

Before the Russian officer could stagger to his feet, and before any other officer could gather wits enough to shout an order, the drones were dirging over Andry's shoulder and the leather bag was filling fast. An instant later the mountain echoed to the strains of "Cock o' the North!" Lilting, laughing, dare-the-devil music shrieked defiance, and to the tune of it—to the swinging, swaying, swaggering quick-step time—Dick led his nine men forward, straight down the middle of the pass between two armed halves of a regiment, and took a new stand by the tortured Persian.

"As a British officer in the territory of a friendly power, I take this man under my protection!" he declared.

It was the devil of a predicament for the Russians, because their orders not to kill Dick Anthony were strict. But there were no orders about his men; and at that instant the Afghan who had gone for bandages came galloping back; it occurred to the Russian officer that to shoot this man would be blood for blood, as well as a lesson to Dick Anthony. His lips were too smashed up from Dick's blow to make speech easy, so he took aim himself. Instantly a shot from Usbeg Ali Khan's Colt automatic knocked the pistol from the Russian's hand; and at that the flood took charge. The Cossacks broke rank and closed in, to shouts in Russian of: 'Don't kill him! Take him alive and beat him first, then drive him to the mountains!" No shots were fired; they came on

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with cold steel, and some men ran for picket-ropes; but the bagpipes shrieked their taunting tune, and the quarry stood at bay with the mien and attitude of practised swordsmen. Another horse went galloping back to the baggage-animals, and now there were nine long, skilfully held swords, not one of which would fail to kill at least one man, to say nothing of two automatic pistols in each Afghan's belt. At close range, the thing was not good enough!

The momentary lull in their enthusiasm was turned into a check and then a halt by shouts from the Russian rear and the sound of shooting. Outposts galloped in from beyond the neck leading to the mountains, and a lot of shouting was followed by a quick return of discipline. Half of the Cossacks formed and wheeled to fight on the defensive, for the mountain refugees had come in force to test for themselves the truth of the tale about Dee-k-Antonee. Andry's bagpipe-music had laughed away their disbelief with its first three bars, and now they were hurrying to help massacre the Russians! They were reported to be coming, too, in more force and with greater determination than could easily be dealt with by one regiment with another quarrel on its hands as well. Shouts from the Russian officers told that, orders or no orders to the contrary, Dick was to be finished off in a hurry, that the whole regiment might face and fight one way.

But Dick, too, had reached a sudden resolution, and before the Russian plan was changed his was in action and gaining speed. A leader who *can* lead by dint of being is all that ten good fighters lack to give them the advantage over numbers.

"Forward!" Dick shouted. And the cheeks of the giant Andry swelled and grew purple with his effort as the little party extended into line and swept forward.

It was not luck that won for them, nor Russian cowardice, for Russians can be brave when their cause is fit for bravery. A dozen facts combined to make the otherwise impossible the only thing that could happen in this instance, and perhaps the least important was that the Russians, coming on from two sides, dared not shoot.

"Fire!" yelled the officers; but a Cossack is no more willing than any other soldier to shoot down his own.

THE main thing was Dick's knowledge that he stood in Persia and his indomitable, stubborn will to champion the under-dog. The justice of his attitude gave him swiftness of decision that the Russians lacked. To him the Russians were outlaws, raiding in foreign territory—the Persian refugees were patriots. The Russians had done damnable iniquity and were contemplating more; they had attacked him; and they had given him no option but to choose between death at their hands or else active coöperation with the Persians. It never entered his tawny, high-held head to run away, as perhaps he might have done now that the Russians were occupied at front and rear.

"Forward!" he shouted, and the cold steel cut a wide swath through the Russian ranks in the direction least expected. The Russians had expected in another minute to be shooting down the pass at ever-lengthening range, for it was fair to guess that Dick would retreat and try to get his party once more mounted. Their guess proved right, but in one way only; Dick charged like a sudden whirlwind for their horses and not his.

It was the football field again, the unexpected dash at an unexpected angle, by a resolute, swift runner well backed up, and then, again, the unexpected. Each had a horse—even Andry had a horse—before the Russians were quite sure what the move meant; and then the Russians knelt to receive cavalry, loaded and waiting for a charge that did not come. They held the road, and there was no escape except through or over them; they thought it wise to hold their fire. But Dick led his men the other way, on, not back again.

Silent, except for drumming hoofs, hard-breathing, without the lilt of bagpipe-music now (for Andry needed both hands to hold on by, and the pipes rode precariously underneath his arm), the ten swept down a forest glade; and this time the pursuers dared not fire for fear of hitting the remaining horses that were squealing at their picket-ropes.

If Dick looked like a king when he walked, he rode like a war-god, and only those who have seen it understand the difference between mere horsemanship, such as soldiers learn, and the sort that is born and bred in a man. Horses recognize it in an instant, and brutes that were unmanageable show their

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paces for a man like Dick. The Persians, sniping from between the boulders, saw burst around a corner into view a ten-man party that, like the Duke of Wellington, would have been worth as many thousand to any side. They roared a welcome to them.

In a moment the rocks gave up their snipers, and a horde of savage riflemen swept down the hillsides, yelling, "*Zindabad Dee-k-Antonee Shah!*" In another minute Dick was riding in the midst of a surging mob that, mob or not, was sweeping the Cossacks back to where they came from; it was no longer a question of whether to retreat or not; the Russians were caught napping, outnumbered, and intent on getting away. Within five minutes they had lost their commanding officer and fifty men.

At the head of a rabble, that was fired by such new hope as to change it into stuff for making armies, Dick swept back through the amphitheater, driving the Cossacks through it at the lower end; he reached the narrow gap himself in hot pursuit in time to see a woman gallop up, riding astride on a Cossack horse. He knew her instantly, and she knew him. She waved to him, and he did not answer.

He watched her gesticulating. He saw her rally the retreating Cossacks and get them to line up again. And then he saw her send one Cossack forward with a white flag. So he waved a handkerchief in answer and busied himself at once in getting his rabble to cease fire; he managed it at last by sending each one of his Afghans to take command of a different cluster of the riflemen. He had his crowd in hand when the Cossack with the white flag rode in through the gap, followed by none other than the Princess Olga Karageorgovich.

"*Bon jour, monsieur le bandit!*" she laughed at him. "I have come to ask you for our Cossack wounded, and to offer you your baggage. Will you exchange? It seems we have no prisoners."

"Send my things and my men's along with Mr. Lancaster," said Dick, "and I'll have your wounded carried through the gap."

She sent the flag-bearer galloping back for Dick's belongings.

"Mr. Lancaster won't come," she said. "He sends you this instead."

She passed Dick a note, written on a torn-off piece of paper, and laughed aloud as she watched the contempt on Dick's face as he read. It ran:

> Now that you have started things, I imagine I can help you better from Teheran. I will send you a message later. R. L.

"Yes," she laughed, "that's all the backing-up you get from High Finance! He's off as fast as a horse can gallop! You had better join partnership with me!"

Dick watched the Cossacks lower down driving his pack-horses in a little timid bunch toward him, and then for nearly a minute looked at the Princess, seeming almost to scorch her with his calm, strong eyes. She felt him read her inner secrets, and loved him the more for it.

"Dick!" she said. "Let us play this game together!"

"So it's your doing again, is it?" he answered.

"No; this time it is my Government. This time my Government has made an outlaw of you, and I offer to help you against my Government. Be too big for them, Dick Anthony! Go on, from big to bigger things—conquer Persia—Asia—the world! I can help you!"

"You can do this," said Dick. "You can go back whence you came and tell your master, the Okhrana, that I am not its tool or fool. Tell whoever it is who owns it, the Czar if need be, that I will be the worst thorn ever Russia had in her side, until Persia is free! I am an outlaw, am I? I will be one with a vengeance!"

"Dick! Dick Anthony!"

She made as if to put her arms out, but he answered with a grim salute and rode away.

"Now, if she were an honest lassie!" murmured Andry, running forward to receive charge of the baggage-horses.

Twenty minutes later Dick, with his bodyguard of nine, was riding toward the higher, wilder mountains. And the fight for Persia's independence, though Dick did not know it yet, was on.

The next adventure of *Dick Anthony of Arran* will appear complete in the next issue.

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THE CAMP-FIRE

A MEETING-PLACE FOR READERS, WRITERS AND ADVENTURERS

AFTER reading "The Greenstone Mask" you'll want to know something about Allan Dunn. You've read stories of his in the *Saturday Evening Post* and elsewhere, but this is his first in *Adventure*, though there are others of his in store, and he has for a long time been a member of the Camp-Fire. In accordance with our custom he stands up among us and gives an account of himself:

Born in London, England, 1872. Equal parts Irish and Scotch. Father's side Irish direct. Winchester Public School, and New College, Oxford. B. A. Rowed on college eight (not university). Trips on Continent. Europe during long vacations. North Spain, France, Tyrol, Norway. Trip to South Africa, to relatives at Johannesburg. Saw something of veld-life. Trip around world; several weeks in India—relatives again. Wrote in London for *Pick-Me-Up* and Jerome K. Jerome's *Idler* (both brilliant but defunct). Also *Daily Graphic* and *Western Morning News*.

TO AMERICA in 1893 on my own. Got handed the usual lemon of a ranch in northwestern Colorado. Did special work for *Rocky Mountain News*, also sketching—chalk-plate days before line-etching or half-tone. In thick of "Bloody Bridle" Waite's troubles as Governor during riots. Dabbled in mining; trips across North Park up Bear and Elk, across Wyoming-Idaho line. Stayed one Summer with Bear River Utes—Yampa tribe. Prospected, hunted. Got snowed in one Winter staying too late for shot at elk. Nearly starved—beans for three weeks. Saw openings of early camps—Creede, Cripple Creek, and Victor. At Leadville with Militia during strike. Lost every cent—considerable—in panic when nearly all of Denver's banks went up in one day, during Brother Bryan's sixteen-to-one campaign. In Denver during riots and street-lynching. Quick trip to Iquique, Chile, in interest of Selves-North interests (Colonel North of nitrate fame). Selves my uncle. Met Barney Barnato there before he went to diamond-fields. He was then a stoker who had location of silver-mine which he shared with Selves on latter's backing.

Went to Cuba—at Siboney—for press syndicate. Sniper clipped me on head—probably spent or deflected bullet. Made a hollow, almost a hole, as permanent souvenir of Spanish-American War.

HAWAII during change to U. S. Territory—newspaper work—correspondence mostly; no cable then. Helped fight Chinatown fire and herd Orientals during bubonic plague. Trip through South Seas on trading-schooner. Revisited Japan, Burma, and India. Back to Hawaii by way Australia, New Zealand, and Samoa. *Dolce far niente* for a while, yachting between islands; golf, polo, swimming.

San Francisco during earthquake and fire; lost all collections and general lares and penates. Handled publicity for Southern Pacific, touring California and general system. Made trip from Omaha to San Francisco on motor-car on track, with photographers. Caught in bad hail-storm on desert—also brush-fire (gasoline car). Going to South Seas again for color for stories, serials, and first novel, "Beyond the Rim." Will keep on going, smaller vessels the better. Work right around. New York first.

Can steer, reef, and navigate. Height, six feet ¾ inch. Weight, 180 in loin-cloth. Been practically all over Union—also general travel on European Continent, Egypt, Algeria.

HERE is a letter from Oregon with some interesting bits of adventure gossip and one question:

Occasionally, however, I cross the trail of a man who has "been there"; for instance, in the course of a conversation today, I learned that my friend was a survivor of the Sioux Massacre of 1862. He is a retired farmer here, and does not look like he had ever seen an Indian.

Here's a little news. The rightful heir to the throne of Servia lives on a ranch near Dodge City, Kan. He goes under the name of Mic Mayrath: I know him well, having often traded with him. At the time of the killing of King Alexander and Queen Draga he refused to go to Servia and ascend the throne, saying the happy life on his ranch was more precious than crowns. I am told he has the family relics, orders and patents to prove his claims.

Lastly, while you are working on historic mysteries, can any one tell us about the cavalryman (not the Crow scout), who escaped from the Custer fight at the Little Big Horn? I've picked up stories to the effect that one man *did* get clear. D. WIGGINS

IN HIS home town, Louisville, Kentucky, Charles Neville Buck met the beachcomber whose "Log" appears in this issue. They foregathered for a while, but Mr. Buck dropped into the office the other day and told me that his man has gone again, suddenly drawn once more into the great maze of wandering roads that calls forever to those who once have yielded themselves to its lure.

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But he has left behind him this record of a beachcomber's daily life. No mighty deeds adorn the narrative. No throbbing romance. No great mystery. Just the plain picture of how and where this man was living his life at a time when his wanderings ended temporarily in the west of South America. Those of you who knew the life, through yourselves or others, will find it a familiar story, bringing back old memories. Those of you who know the genus beachcomber only through print will, I think, find this autobiography of peculiar interest as a bit of realism.

I HAPPENED to be on the first magazine to print any of the *Arsène Lupin* stories in America. That was some six or seven years ago. Since then, as you know, *Arsène Lupin* has become famous in magazines, books, and on the stage, in this country and in Europe. Here is a bit of news about him and his creator:

Maurice Leblanc, after publishing many novels and volumes of stories of psychological interest, sprang suddenly into universal fame through his creation of that popular hero, *Arsène Lupin*, a gentleman-burglar of a hitherto unsuspected type. In a sense, *Arsène Lupin* is the embodiment of all that is most attractive in the French people—dash, chivalry, courtesy, light-heartedness, and immense courage under immense difficulties.

M. Leblanc is a native of Normandy, and one of his sisters, Mlle. Georgette Leblanc, the well known poetic actress, is married to M. Maurice Maeterlinck. He is about forty-five years of age, is married, and has for some time been a vice-president of the Société des Gens de Lettres.

HERE, again, is the brief explanation of our identification-cards. They are offered free of charge to any of you. All we ask is that you comply carefully with the simple directions as they appear below in italics:

The cards bear this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of ADVENTURE, New York, U. S. A., stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one friend, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. The names and addresses will be treated as confidential by us. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for purposes of business identification. Later, arrangements may perhaps be made for money deposits to cover cable or telegraph notifications. Cards furnished free of charge, *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application. Send no applications without the two names and two addresses in full.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Later, for the cost of manufacture, we may furnish, instead of the above cards, a card or tag of aluminum, proof against heat, water, and general wear and tear, for adventurers when actually in the jungle, desert, etc.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give the two names and addresses in full when applying.*

SOME time ago we printed Captain Fritz Duquesne's summary of his personal experiences, and received some letters objecting to some of the things he said about the English Army during the Boer War. I declined to print these because the writers refused to let me do so over their own names. Since Captain Duquesne had spoken over his own name, it was only fair that those who answered him should do the same.

There follows a letter from one of two critics who had the courage not to reply anonymously. I print it in full in the interest of fair play, so that both sides may be presented. I think the English side could have been presented more effectively if more moderation had been used, and I have already expressed my regret that when Captain Duquesne gave me his hasty rough notes I did not, as he expected me to do, smooth them out for publication.

Each side having had its say, the discussion is closed so far as the "Camp-Fire" is concerned.

"Captain" (?) Duquesne's account of himself in your December issue is certainly akin to Don Quixote or Baron Munchausen.

The British military authorities *never* by any chance condemn a man to death or imprisonment without a trial, not even a "sniper" or a spy. I won't dispute the words, "I was sentenced to be shot on sight," but will say that Duquesne personally was not sentenced to be shot on sight—the order implied he or any of the other "brave" (?) snipers. The only time a person would be shot on sight is in attempting to escape, as a prisoner of war, or treachery.

UNDER no circumstances are any prisoners permitted to be tortured—yes, they would in all probability be tried to be bribed or even threatened, but I do say most emphatically that they would not be tortured. They were never even given a taste of the *sjambok* because they did not give their boots to their captors. They were never even kicked because they did not march fast enough to keep up with the rest of the prisoners. Did the Boers do this to the Britishers? Yes, and a hundred times worse. Did a British soldier ever spit in a Boer prisoner's face? No, but did the Boers do this to their prisoners? Yes.

At Eland's Laagte if the wounded and surrendered were ever charged upon, it was only after dirty treachery with the white flag.

HOW comes it that if sentenced to life imprisonment comes he to be sent to the Bermudas? All convicts were sent to a penal establishment in England. No sentence is ever inflicted as mentioned; viz., life imprisonment in irons. The only

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ime a convict is sentenced to be put in irons is after scape or attempted escape. This also carries with t solitary confinement. No such iron as figure-ight leg-irons are used in the prison service of Great Britain.

Commissioned officers when prisoners of war are nvariably paroled, *but* the breaking of the parole is punished with death when the person breaking the parole is recaptured.

Ask Mr. Duquesne to read this carefully: "Prisoners of war are subject to confinement or imprisonment, such as may be deemed necessary on account of safety, *but they are not to be subjected* to no other intentional suffering or indignity. The confinement and mode of treating a prisoner may be varied during his captivity according to the demands of safety."

A PRISONER of war who escapes may be shot or otherwise killed in his flight, but neither death nor any other punishment shall be inflicted upon him simply for his attempt to escape, which the LAW OF WAR DOES NOT CONSIDER A CRIME. Stricter means of security shall be used after an unsuccessful attempt at escape. If, however, a conspiracy is discovered, the purpose of which is a united or general escape, the conspirators may be rigorously punished, even with death; and capital punishment may also be inflicted upon prisoners of war discovered to have plotted rebellion against the authorities of the captors, whether in union with fellow prisoners or other persons. The modern LAW OF WAR does not permit the use of any violence against prisoners in order to extort the desired information, or to punish or torture them for having given false information.

HERE is another section of military law that might cover the whole case; "*Armed prowlers*, by whatever names they may be called, who steal within the lines of the hostile army for the purpose of robbing, killing, or of destroying bridges, roads, or canals, or of robbing or destroying the mail, or of cutting telegraph-wires, are *not* entitled to the privileges of the prisoner of war."

In Bermuda why were Bosch and Dutoit kept in irons and also in the "cage"? (Never saw or heard of such a place in Bermuda). Was there no room in the prisoners' camp?

JOHN KEENS, (Late Sergeant Major)
General Delivery, San Diego, Cal.

OUR stories about *Miss Dem* give no particular indication that their author, C. Hilton-Turvey, has knocked about the world to any extent. He has. But though he has told me some of his adventures, he prefers, for the time at least, to let these stories of the stage and the movies stand entirely apart from the man who wrote them.

I'VE spent twenty-eight or thirty years, from the Everglades to Holy Cross Bay, on land, on sea, in foreign countries, and elsewhere, always earning my way, and now I want to tell folks about some of the things that have come under my notice.

The above by way of introduction, according to our Camp-Fire custom, from E. Kirby Keener, now of Los Angeles, who gives us his first story in *Adventure* this month, "The Chechakos." Our greetings to him.

HERE'S a letter referring to Talbot Mundy's story back in the June number. Lest any one get the idea that Mr. Mundy wrote in a spirit of anything but friendliness to the Jews, I'll quote two paragraphs from the story in question. (Remember also that he was writing primarily and specifically of the English Army.)

In spite of the fact that Jews put up the finest, doggedest, most desperate fight in history; although it was they, with none to help them, who held Titus and his engineers at bay, and—as if that were not enough—fought one another while they did it, there is a time-worn theory that the Jews do not make good soldiers. Perhaps the theory is right. Perhaps their imaginations are too keen, and their brains too active; and it is possibly true that they must be forced into a corner before they will put up any kind of offensive resistance.

But it is much more probable that the theory gained ground because few good Jews are ever in a case where they must enlist or starve. If they are good Jews, their own people will look after them; and if they are bad Jews, neither the Army nor anybody else has any use for them.

Here is the letter:

I beg to refer to Mr. Mundy's story, "The Gentility of Ikey Blumendall." I've been watching the news-stands the past week for the June *Adventure*, just to read Mr. Mundy's story. I thank him for the kindly spirit in which it was written, but wish to differ with him. As an American first, but a Jew, I wish to reply.

Thackeray refers to the Jew Mendoza as "that fighting member of a fighting race." Besant does likewise. Now the reason the Jew has kept aloof from the armies of the world as much as possible is not because he has no use for them, but because pork is served. Some of my cousins in Hungary, who are coming of age and will enter the Hungarian Army, wish to come to America because of the unorthodox food.

THE Australian contingents in the Boer War were known jokingly as the Cohentingents for an obvious reason. Both their commanders were Jews and were knighted. I believe Zangwill said few regiments in the British Army have not their Jews proud to serve in them. I believe I can say that there are more Jews, in proportion to their numbers, in the American Army than any other race excepting the Irish and perhaps the Scotch. Two out of the first seventeen Americans killed at the taking of Vera Cruz—Frolichstein of Mobile and Meisenberg of Chicago—were Jews. Two out of seventeen, to say nothing of the wounded. And in proportion to population the Jews are less than one in fifty!

I WALKED into the Chicago Ghetto recently and spoke with two people inside of a half hour. One was a girl who told me two brothers-in-law had been in the Army during the Spanish-American War.

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Another, himself an ex-sergeant, told me the battle-call was on him, and only love for his four-year-old child prevented his giving up a prosperous contracting business and joining again. His wife mentioned that Mrs. Silberstein's brother was in the Army, and she hoped he would not be killed. Mrs. Silberstein runs a haberdashery-store across the way from the ex-sergeant's. I spoke to two people and got information regarding *four* soldiers!

BUT of ten young people with whom I "pal," one entered the Army—he was a Jew. Another, also a Jew, was refused by the Navy on account of his partial deafness. There are some Irish and Germans in the ten, and none tried to enlist. The writer himself was refused because of nearsightedness. Mr. Mundy's Jew is the vaudeville Jew, a regiment of whom were chased home by two drunken Irishmen.

Pardon me for taking up this amount of space, but I trust, in justice to thousands of your Jewish readers, that you will publish this in full. The Irishman is of a fighting race, and ask him who is his pal in the fighting. He'll invariably answer that other held-down race, the Jew.

M. J. NEWMAN, Chicago.

IN RESPONSE to the many inquiries we have prepared full data on the Adventurers' Club, which will be sent on request. I think you all know that the Adventurers' Club and our Camp-Fire are entirely different matters, the latter being open to any one with the spirit of adventure in him. The Club has no connection with the magazine, though most of us are in sympathy with its spirit and purpose.

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relatives Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada.

PHIL DAVENPORT, telephone lineman, last heard of with Madeira-Mamore R. R., Porto Welho, Brazil; and Clayborn Jackson, structural iron-worker, last heard from on new free bridge in St. Louis, Mo.—Address O. R. KEPLER, 3428 Indiana Ave., Chicago, Ill. (care J. Stone).

WILLIAM HENRY BARNES, my father. Blind violinist; black hair and mustache; 5 ft. 6 in. No word for 19 years.—Address MRS. ETHEL MITCHELL, Beggs, Okla.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

KEMP, in 1911 beer-wagon driver in Oakland, your friend Hanner got killed by savages in the Montanas of Peru. Write and I will give you details.—Address WILLIAM VOGT, 821 Turk St., San Francisco, Cal.

FREDERICK PAIGE, lost on the *Maine* in Havana Harbor. Will shipmate who knew him intimately address E. H. PAIGE, Davenport, Wash.

IF WILLIAM CLARE or "Big Tom" remembers Slim Jonesy and what happened on the *Merry Andrew* off Hog Island, 1911, write. Also Count Steurtzel. Also "Doc" Leach, who'll know me by a cracked shoulder-blade he got from a 'Jibway breed one night, with the tramp that followed.—Address No. L T 243.

OLD comrade in arms, Maj. Don. C. A. Rivers, once member of the S. A. L. H., the B. B. P., and the N. M. P., all South African Corps. The Major is of light cavalry weight, 5 ft. 6 in. tall, dark complexion. As a soldier of fortune the Major has seen a lot of War Service, from the Zulu War to the late Boer War. Also went through the Madero revolution in Mexico. Has a number of war medals and general-action bars.—Address JACK PEARCE, late captain South African Light Horse, Gen. Del., El Paso, Tex.

DENNIS CLIFFORD. Left Eau Claire, Wis., in early eighties. Was about 32 years, dark hair, blue eyes, 5 ft. 7, about 160 weight. Formerly a lumberman. Heard from in 1882 from Greeley, Col.—Address K. MACDONALD, 219 Lake Ave., N., Duluth, Minn.

A. A. KILBURN. At last accounts he intended to go to Labrador.—Address Capt. JACK BONAVITA, Sulphur Springs, Tampa, Fla.

TOMMY ARRINGTON, Chief Yeoman on U. S. S. *Des Moines*, 1907-1909. Last heard of in Boston, 1912, with Peerless Auto Co.—Address ROGER W. LITTLER, 3301½ Worth St., Dallas, Tex.

CHARLES B. RUSSELL, Hospital Corps, U. S. Army, 1900-1901 on the Island of Panay.—Address, No. L T 242.

JAMES H. SARRIS, last seen at Spring Valley, White Pine Co., Nev.—Address SOLOMON HANCOCK, Keystone, Nye Co., Nev., via Tonopah.

CHARLES T. HALL, of Chicago, who said his mother lived in Detroit, Mich. Important.—Address R. BIESENTHAL, 122 W. Chestnut St., Louisville, Ky.

F. RAMPBY and F. Balance, or Harry Balance, who were in Norfolk, Va., in Sept. and Oct., 1912, write.—Address JIMMIE VANCE or "TEXAS," care H. I. JEFFER, 503 Felder Ave., Montgomery, Ala.

W. H. ENSIGN, printer, last heard of in New York City. Canada papers copy.—Address MRS. SARAH ENSIGN, 186 North St., Jersey City, N. J.

TED DICKSON, late night editor *Morning Journal*, Key West, Fla., write B. W., *State-Journal*, Frankfort, Ky.

ANY one that worked in J. F. Marshell's and John Brugar's paper-box shops in the early sixties in Manchester, N. H.—Address J. A. MORRIS, Sr., 719 So. 5th St., Ocala, Fla.

KIRK R. SNOWBERGER, tall, athletic build, age about 30, dark-brown hair and eyes. Missing for ten years. Last heard of at Denver. In Spanish-American War. May have gone to Alaska.—Address his uncle, J. BLAIR SHOENFELT, Box 1376, Oceanpark, Cal.

You will get quicker response by using your name and address instead of a number.

WILL, there is a letter for you in the post-office at Sydney, Australia. Ask to see the postmaster. Ma and Nora.—Address MRS. BESSIE MARTIN, 152 Manchester St., Leominster, Mass.

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'RED JORDAN and wife Annie, daughter of David M. Carter of Boston, Mass. Last heard of in England.—ddress F. L. CARTER, Box 71, Augusta, Mo.

)RRIS H. COMSTOCK, last heard of in Boston, Mass., Fall of 1911. Was on barge-canal in Western New ork in 1910.—Address JACK FORD, Gen. Del., Albany, . Y.

RONALD E. ELMSIE. Worked on survey in Minnesota, 1907.—Address IRVIN E. HARRIS, 901 Tenth ve., West, Cedar Rapids, Ia.

)AUL M. T. KANTHAR, in Army near Boston.—Address L. T. 239.

)AUL SORENTZEN, alias "Sam Wilson," of Dubuque, Ia., and New York State. "Dutch" write.—Address T 239.

OMRADES, Co. G, 41st Inf., Philippines 1899-1901. Also Captain Graves' company, 20th Inf., in fight at aloocan, Batangas, P. I. (Lake Taal.)—Address HARRY A. AYLOR, Sergt. Police Dept., 240 Centre St., New York City.

WILLIAM M. ORPEN, age 34, left Brooklyn, N. Y., eight years ago for California.—Address his uncle, . T. DONOVAN, 484 Greene Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.

ELIZABETH MATILDA WILLIAMS, taken from Brashear, La., as a child in the Civil War.—Address her ousin, ALVIN S. SMITH, Box 204, Tarpon Springs, Fla.

WILLIAM MILLER, electrician, last heard of in Stanford, Canada, 1911.—Address his mother, MRS. MARY MILLER, 4922 Charles St., Madisonville, O.

LYDIA LOOPMAN, formerly of Waynesburg, Pa.—Address L T 238.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

GENE GILLESPIE ("Manhattan").—Address JACK CHANDON, or BILL EVERETT, care Gen. Del., El Paso, Tex.

BURTON L. BURHANS. Brother dying.—Address A. EUGENE BURHANS, 80 Kingston St., Rochester, N. Y.

J. L. HUFFMAN, commonly called Johnnie. Printer.—Address his mother, MRS. C. H. WHITNEY, 2236 8th St., Baker, Ore.

CHARLES KNIGHT, of Winterset, Ia., and Spokane, Wash.—Address R. E. DANFORTH, Winterset, Ia.

GEBBS, or Gibbs, rebel junta courier, in Santa Rosalia when I was there with Col. Juan Porras, chasing bridge-dynamiters (Orozco revolt).—Address JACK ZIMMERMAN, Pulaski, Pa.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

THE following have been inquired for in full in the August and September issues of ADVENTURE. They can get name of inquirer from this magazine.

Inquiries will be printed three times. In the January and July issues all unfound back names will be printed again: Adams, Eddis, sign-writer; Blankman, Charles H., working in D. L. & W. machine shops, Buffalo, N. Y.; Byers, R. C.; Cooper, J. Howard; Cuyler, Alston, O.; Dalton, Jack J.; Davies, "Guy;" Fedoroski, Karol; Fullmer, Frank F.; Goodwin, James Alexander, 36th U. S. V.; Hayes, "Bob;" Hinckley, Roy and Harry; Hollis, Bach; Lake, Bruce; Leigh, T. G.; McCarthy, Dan, rigger on Victoria Falls Bridge, Nyanza; Merle, Eugene; Nolan, Michael, born in Kilkenny; Rickard, Mrs. Lauretta; Thomson, Corp. John, 2nd Canadian Mounted Rifles, Boer War; Young, James B.

MISCELLANEOUS—J. L. F.; Boys in Army, Navy or Marine Corps in the China Relief Expedition of 1900 and 1901; Nelda, Miss Winniefred, Wilson, Francis and their father, of the Mexican Central R. R. Company.

NUMBERS 56, 68, 73, 76, W 93, W 107, W 140 W 150, W 153, W 183, W 184, W 189, W 195, W 203, W 212, W 215, C 189, C 198, C 205, L T 207. Please send us your present addresses. Letters forwarded to you at addresses given us don't reach you.—Address A. S. HOFFMAN, care *Adventure*.

WILLIAM C. SHAW, please send us your present address. Mail sent you at address given us doesn't reach you.—Address A. S. HOFFMAN, care *Adventure*.

MANUSCRIPTS sent us by the following are being held by us, having been returned to us as unclaimed at the addresses furnished:

W. Lynch, Trenton, N. J.; W. Mack, Pacheca, Mexico; Henry W. Edwards, New York; W. G. Gormley, Ontario, Canada; George Stillions, Chicago, Ill.; Francis Manston, Chicago, Cal.; Charles E. Mack, New York; William Barry Kane, Chocolate Bayou, Texas.

IMPORTANT NOTICE

AS ANNOUNCED in the July issue, every item hereafter will be published three times, then taken out. But in the *January* and *July* numbers of each year we will publish the names of all who have been inquired for and remain unfound.

WANTED —MEN

NOTE.—We offer this corner of the Camp-Fire, free of charge, to our readers. Naturally we can not vouch for any of the letters, the writers thereof, or any of the claims set forth therein, beyond the fact that we receive and publish these letters in good faith. We reserve the privilege of not publishing any letters or parts of a letter. Any inquiry for men sent to this magazine will be considered as intended for publication, at our discretion, in this department, with all names and addresses given therein printed in full, unless such inquiry contains contrary instructions. In the latter case we reserve the right to substitute for real names any numbers or other names. We are ready to forward mail through this office, but assume no responsibility therefor. **N.B.—Items asking for money rather than men will not be published.**

I HAVE discovered a large territory 150 miles from Chicago in which I have found mastodon and other animals, lying in clay and gravel 4 to 9 ft. below surface. Any one who wants to dig into this find, write me.—Address ARCH MEADO, Goodland, Ind.

PHYSICIAN, surgeon, author, in perfect health, age 46, unencumbered, with assured income of $1,000 annually, wishes to connect with kindred spirit of equal financial and intellectual standing for travel to odd corners for sport, adventure and possibly literary material. References given and expected. Can start any time for any place.—Address No. W 240.

COMPANION for a tramp through Europe. Should be about twenty-one, ready to rough it and work his way along. Start from New York City. Name qualifications.—Address No. W 241.

Inquiries for opportunities instead of men are NOT printed in this department.

PARTNER, must be practical miner and prospector, for trip to Shirigni Mountains, Panama. Probably start Dec., 1914.—Address G. A. R., Cody, Neb.

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THE TRAIL AHEAD

A GOOD many magazines don't condescend to talk directly to their readers in any way—no asking of opinions, no chat about the inside workings of the magazine, nothing but the formal publication of stories and articles with never a word to indicate any human feeling between editors and readers.

I have always believed the stiff, overdignified, old-fashioned editorial attitude toward readers a very stupid one. Any magazine is entirely dependent upon the likes and dislikes of the reading public, and it is folly not to try to learn direct what these likes and dislikes are. In the second place, this is a pretty hard old world at best, so why miss any opportunity to establish human relations instead of cold formality?

Now a lot of what I'm going to say is based on pure policy—the best way to sell as many copies of *Adventure* as possible. I make no bones about that. That is what every magazine is started for.

But I'm talking about something more than that. From the first I've tried hard to make *Adventure* human and to establish really personal, friendly relations with as many of our readers and writers as possible. This magazine is my day's work, and, whatever it may be, I want my day's work to let me meet other human beings on a human footing. The old notion that editors are some kind of superhuman being makes me sick under the belt.

Well, that's all right; but how is it going to be done? I don't know. If I talk too much about it, it will seem like "hot air" only. Little by little, I suppose. At least I have got into personal touch with hundreds and hundreds of you in the past few years and am richer for it, and enjoy my work the more because of it.

Let me say just this one thing—I sincerely want each of you to feel *Adventure* is *one* magazine that means more than mere good reading. That when it can do something for you personally it will always have the desire to do it and frequently can. That it is founded on and stands for an impulse common to the whole race—the impulse for adventure. That it serves as a bond among all those who feel this impulse, as a meeting-place for them, as the one publication or club that makes their interests its own, and as the means of giving to that vast majority who can not themselves follow the wandering paths the chance to meet those who can and do follow them.

No, we don't pretend to be a philanthropic institution. Like everybody else, we're out to make money, and there's no use being hypocritical about it. But that isn't all we're out for, and sooner or later you'll be convinced.

TRIPLETS TRIUMPHANT *By Robert V. Carr*

The Jetts brothers furnish a tale of the West. Action, laughter, human interest. (A complete novelette.)

THE SINEWS OF WAR *By Arthur D. Howden Smith*

A two-part story of the Balkans by one who has fought there.

JUST NUTS *By Ross Ellis*

A business adventure.

COME-ON CHARLEY AND THE RED SEA FLEAS *By Thomas Addison*

If you've followed the papers you know fleas can cost thousands of dollars.

FEATURING MORTON ST. CLAIR *By Gordon McCreagh*

An adventure with the movies.

ARSÈNE LUPIN—AND THE TIGER'S TEETH *By Maurice Leblanc*

The end and climax of this tremendous detective story.

EDDIE HAYNES, LIGHTWEIGHT *By Allan Dunn*

A prize-ring story.

IVANOFF FIGHTS AND RIDES *By George Shepherd*

A horse, Hawaii, polo, a Jap, and Ivanoff.

THE SOFT HEART OF JULES LEBRUN *By Henry Oyen*

A tale of the Canadian woods.

THE LION THAT WENT TO WAR *By Ledward Rawlinson*

A South American laugh.

AND OTHERS! AND OTHERS! AND OTHERS!

In the meantime consider us of the staff human beings exactly like yourself, and talk to us and treat us accordingly. There being only twenty-four hours in a day, we can't answer all letters as fully as we'd like to. We can't make the magazine suit each of you in all respects; other readers may want exactly the opposite. But you can bet your last cent it is our pleasure as well as our policy to try to give you, in every detail, what the majority of you want. Have I ever told you that we keep a typewritten copy of every criticism that comes in from any reader, and that the "Criticism File" is passed around the office so that all of us can profit by it and come nearer to giving you what the majority want?

Feel that you have a part in shaping the magazine, in deciding which writers shall appear in it, in determining what kinds of stories it shall print. If you will "boost" us to your friends, of course we'll be grateful, but, though it doesn't help us so much in circulation, we can't help liking it still more when your letters show you feel you are one of us, and that our interests are the same.

And if you still have any of the old idea that an editor—this one anyhow—is a cold and *lofty* highbrow, kill it. A human is all right if he isn't an editor, but an editor's no good if he isn't human.

In the center of the page you'll find some of the things to be in the next issue (November, out Oct. 3). Under each is a line or two to give you an idea of what the story's about. There isn't any loud noise about how good they are. You're to be the judge.—A. S. H.

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Make Your Mother Proud of You

Your mother expected big things of you. She **knew** that you had character, determination and ambition. She looked for you to make a career for yourself.

ARE you making good? ARE you getting ahead the way she wanted you to? ARE you realizing YOUR OWN ambitions and the hopes of your mother, sisters, sweetheart or wife?

Think it over! Is your future bright, or are you in a rut where promotion is years away?

Resolve **now** to get ahead. Make up for lost time. You're **never** too old to learn. Find out how the International Correspondence Schools can help you to realize your ambitions.

Get Ahead More Quickly

Success is merely a matter of **training.** To **earn** more, you must **know** more. Get the training that will qualify you for a better job. More than 1,000 men of all ages and in all circumstances get better jobs every month as a result of I. C. S. training, in spare-hour study. **You** can do the same.

Get ahead more quickly. Fit yourself for the future that you prefer. Learn how easily you can fit yourself for a better salary.

Mark the Coupon

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Box 884 SCRANTON, PA.

Explain, without further obligation on my part, how I can qualify for the position before which I mark **X**

Salesmanship	Civil Service
Electrical Engineer	Railway Mail Clerk
Elec. Lighting Supt.	Bookkeeping
Electric Car Running	Stenography & Typewriting
Electric Wireman	Window Trimming
Telephone Expert	Show Card Writing
Architect	Lettering & Sign Painting
Building Contractor	Advertising
Architectural Draftsman	Commercial Illustrating
Structural Engineer	Industrial Designing
Concrete Construction	Commercial Law
Mechan. Engineer	Automobile Running
Mechanical Draftsman	Teacher
Refrigeration Engineer	English Branches
Civil Engineer	Good English for Every One
Surveyor	Agriculture
Mine Superintendent	Poultry Farming
Metal Mining	Plumbing & Steam Fitting
Locomotive Fireman & Eng.	Sheet Metal Worker
Stationary Engineer	Navigation — Spanish
Textile Manufacturing	Languages — French
Gas Engines	Chemist — German

Name_____

Present Occupation_____

Street and No. _____

City_____ State_____

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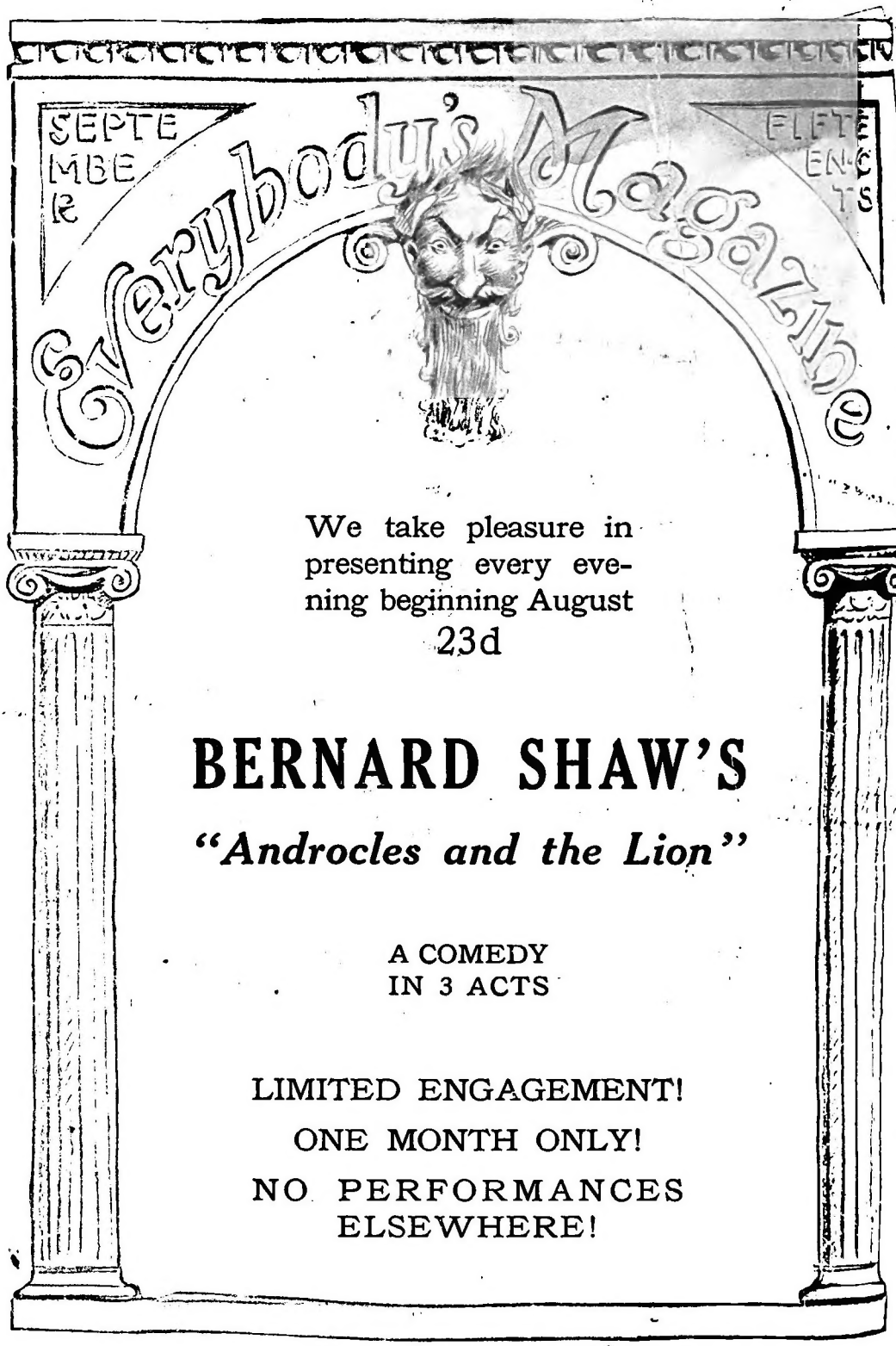

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BERNARD SHAW'S

"Androcles and the Lion"

A COMEDY
IN 3 ACTS

LIMITED ENGAGEMENT!

ONE MONTH ONLY!

NO PERFORMANCES ELSEWHERE!

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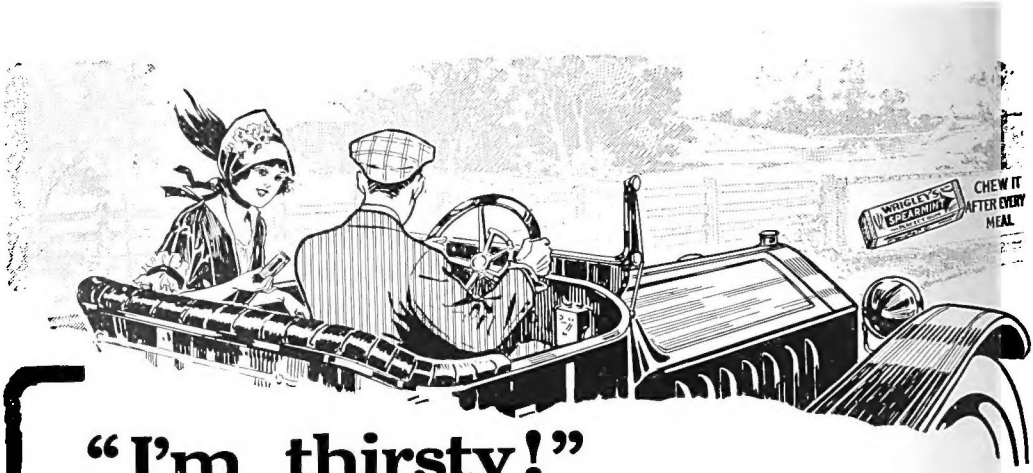

"I'm thirsty!"

"That reminds me—
in my side pocket you will find my ever-ready "first aid" to enjoyment

WRIGLEY'S SPEARMINT

It will moisten and soothe your mouth and throat and take away the parch caused by the dust. I always carry it."

Nobody can afford to be without this economical, beneficial, refreshing, mint-flavored confection.

Every Package Tightly Sealed

The BIGGEST 5 cents' worth of enjoyment you can buy.

Chew it after every meal

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